

THE LAST CONVERSATIONS OF SAINT THERISE THE NEWMANN PRESS

Novissima Verba

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of

Saint

Thérèse

THE NEUMANN PRESS



The Last Conversations
of Saint Thérèse

Novissima Verba

The Last Conversations and Confidences of
Saint Thérèse of the Child Jesus

MAY—SEPTEMBER, 1897

with Introduction by

HIS EMINENCE

FRANCIS CARDINAL SPELLMAN

"Gather up the fragments . . . lest they be lost."

(JOHN 6:12)

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Note



THESE "confidences and conversations" of Saint Thérèse of the Child Jesus were recorded by Reverend Mother Agnes of Jesus* as she heard the

* Mother Agnes was the sister of Saint Thérèse of the Child Jesus. As Pauline Martin, she entered the Carmel of Lisieux, France, on October 2, 1882, where she died on July 28, 1951, having filled the office of Prioress for more than fifty years. In October, 1886, the second Martin sister, Marie, entered the Carmel of Lisieux and after a life of heroic holiness, died there on January 20, 1940. On April 9, 1888, Thérèse Martin, who, according to the words of a Sovereign Pontiff, has become "the greatest saint of modern times," joined her two sisters at the Carmel and died like a seraph on September 30, 1897. She was canonized on May 17, 1925. Léonie, the third oldest child, entered the Visitation Order in 1899. Although not favored by nature and grace in the same degree as were the other members of the family, she surmounted every obstacle to her vocation to the religious life (she had entered—and left—the Visitation Order more than once) and died as a worthy spiritual emulor of her sisters at the Visitation of Caen in June, 1944.

Céline, the third youngest child of Mr. and Mrs. Louis Martin, remained in the world until the death of her venerable father, and entered Carmel on September 14, 1894. At the present writing (August, 1952) she is the only surviving member of the family that has left its permanent mark on the spiritual growth of the Church of God. For St. Thérèse of the Child Jesus, her sister, restored to its exalted rank in the economy of salvation the Way of Spiritual Childhood, introduced by Jesus Christ Himself when He held up a little child as the exemplar to

words uttered by the Saint herself. Committed to writing day by day, they were, for the most part, submitted to the Ecclesiastical Tribunal during the Process of Beatification and Canonization.

Certain other well-known conversations Saint Thérèse had with other members of her community during this period but at which Mother Agnes was not present are not included in this volume.

His Apostles. She has inscribed the Martin legend in the annals of the Catholic Church for time and eternity.

Preface



Grand Séminaire de Bayeux,
November 10, 1926

Dear Reverend Mother,

The brief life of your holy little Sister, Thérèse of the Child Jesus, was marked by a constant ascension toward the perfection of Divine Love. The nearer she approached to that final ecstasy which was to bear her into the arms of her adorable Master, the more clearly did her words and actions give expression to the living perfection of her soul, and depict for us those lessons in true sanctity which it is her mission to pass on to posterity. As Elias, when quitting this world, left the plenitude of "his spirit" to his beloved disciple [Eliseus], so in these *novissima verba* has your holy little Sister, with loving and unaffected spontaneity, bequeathed to us, in condensed form, all that was most exquisite in her relations with God. With what loving care did you not, as you took your station at her bedside, note down day by day and hour by hour, during her last months of agony, all she said and did! You did not omit the shortest

syllable or overlook the least gesture which might reveal the dispositions of her heart.

It is true that in the supplementary chapter of *Histoire d'une Âme*,* and also in the biographies of the Saint which have been prepared under your direction, you had already unfolded for us the general trend of the words and actions of Thérèse in her last days on earth. But in these publications you did not include the manifold details of this, your intimate Journal, which would have lengthened the narrative and disturbed the proportions of the works in question. Perhaps, too, you hesitated to divulge without further consideration the pages of a diary which you instinctively felt contained sacred confidences of a very intimate nature.

But now you realize that the numerous souls whom your little Sister has conquered and guided in "her way" are eager to know her better. And you believe that the depths of her heart and the sincerity of her virtue will be more fully revealed by these words and actions of hers which were more spontaneously brought into play. Yes, this little book you have given us is a treasure, in truth the very testament of our dear Saint. We find

*The definitive English edition of *Histoire d'une Âme* is *Saint Thérèse of Lisieux: Autobiography* (New York, P. J. Kenedy & Sons, 1927).

here her character more truly manifested than in any other record. Thank you for not having kept the treasure for yourself alone.

Be pleased, Reverend Mother, to accept my homage and devoted sentiments in Our Lord.

P. TH. DUBOSQ, *Superior*
Vicar-General, Promoter of the Faith in the
Process of the Canonization of
Saint Thérèse of the Child Jesus



Thérèse - First Communicant

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Introduction



NOVISSIMA VERBA are words spoken by Saint Thérèse during her long, last illness. Millions of souls throughout the world have read and have been inspired by these utterances and multitudes of searching hearts have learned through the Little Flower to tread the path which she herself identifies as her "little way." But Saint Thérèse did not invent this "way." It was Christ Who called Himself "the way" and came to earth to teach it to all men by living it. From the days of the Apostles, Christians were known as the people "of *This Way*" and anyone essaying to walk this way became known as "little" even as Christ Himself was "meek and humble of heart." Saint John the Baptist pointed out the relationship of holiness to littleness, saying, "He must increase but I must decrease," and so too did Saint Thérèse point out this same way of life to all who would seek and follow it.

In the glowing tides of love and humility, the Little Flower abandoned self to God's mercy, confident that "he who has begun a good work" in her, would "bring it to perfection until the day of Christ

Jesus." Throughout this book we are ever reminded that self-love is the only obstacle to growth in divine love. And Saint Thérèse's urgings to be accepted as "little" established her as a sister in spirit to the shining galaxy of spiritual giants who, down through the centuries, have blazed the trail for souls in quest of perfection. She was cloistered for nine years and died at the age of twenty-four. Yet despite her short life, she ranges on the same high plane with Catherine of Siena, Teresa of Avila, Paul of Tarsus, Augustine of Hippo, Francis of Assisi, and John of the Cross.

Saint Thérèse is close to the Poor Man of Assisi, exemplar of universal brotherhood. Like him, she preached the deathless Gospel of Love by living for others. Like him, the Little Flower felt close in heart to man, beast, and flower. Like him, by making herself poor, divine Love made her rich. But Saint Thérèse's most endearing virtue was her unshakable confidence in God's mercy.

This new edition of *NOVISSIMA VERBA* should be of great spiritual assistance coming at this fateful hour in history when mounting miseries and sorrows and tragedies of men are testing even the faith of believers in the compassion of our Heavenly Father. But if mankind needs a sign that God is in His Heaven it is not because of His lack of

love for us, but rather because of our own meager measure of devotion to Him. And Saint Thérèse, Patroness of Confidence, is God's sign of love to multitudes of "little" souls suffering through man's unbelievable inhumanity to man.

Why do men refuse to follow "the way" of Spiritual Childhood, the way Christ taught us? Saint Thérèse walked that way and God wills that the whole world walk that selfsame way. The Church in proclaiming Saint Thérèse Patroness of Russia, committed to her care a tremendous mission. But, the Little Flower has a mission to achieve not alone for one nation, but for *all* nations—the sacred charge to bring children back to God, and all men are God's children. By devout, daily prayers and sacrifices of legions of "little souls," and through the intercession of Saint Thérèse, the gates of grace will open, converting a faithless, warring, misery-laden world into a world of faith and happiness and peace!

O Blessed Prince of Peace!
We adore Thee,
We love Thee,
We praise Thee.

In this hour of dreadful need
We implore Thee, dear Jesus—save us!

Crimsoned war clouds gather once again about us
To rain down ruin, blood, and death.
Save us or we perish from the earth;
Save us by Thy love for mankind,
By Thy love for Thy Church,
By Thy love for souls,
Save us, for we cannot save ourselves!

By Thy pierced heart, save us!
Make our hearts one with Thine,
That our will may be Thy will,
Thy divine love, our love,
That we may make reparation for the sins of the
world,
Thus to avert the wrath of Thy justice
Upon a wilful, sinful world,
A world that has defied Thy laws,
Mocked Thy love,
And taken unto itself strange gods.

By Thy Sacred Wounds, O Jesus, save us!
Heal Thou the wounds of a world now dying,
A world crucified on its cross of sin,
By wounds of anarchy and atheism,
Despotism and slavery, fear and greed,
Wounds of disease, desolation, and death.
Pour into the soul of this stricken world, O God,
The oil and wine of Thy mercy and truth.

By Thy thorn-crowned head, O Jesus, save us!
Make the light of Thy holy mind
Shine into the minds of men,
Dispelling distrust and deceit,
Inspiring them with the purposes of Thy will,
That by common council and consent,
Mutual understanding and co-operation,
Men may build through Thee
Enduring and universal peace,
A peace which man alone cannot find,
The peace which God alone can give.

O Blessed Prince of Peace,
Who rulest by love and love alone,
We consecrate ourselves to Thy Sacred Heart.
With faith and hope and love,
We follow Thee, O Jesus, and beg Thee,
Reign in the kingdom of our hearts,
And grant, that through Thy Church,
Men may learn to live,
In happiness and liberty and peace. Amen.

FRANCIS CARDINAL SPELLMAN
Holy Name of Mary, 1952



Saint Thérèse - Sacristan

May



MAY 1, 1897

"My heart is filled to the brim with the joy of heaven today. . . . Last evening I prayed so much to the Blessed Virgin, while reflecting that her beautiful month was about to commence."



MAY 9, 1897

In reference to the sentiments we sometimes experience when, having rendered a service, we receive not the slightest sign of thanks, the Saint remarked:

"I assure you, I, too, experience those same sentiments; but I am never disillusioned for I am not looking for any reward on earth. I perform all my actions for God alone and, in this way, there is nothing lost, and I am always well repaid for the trouble I have taken to serve my neighbor."



MAY 15, 1897

"I really do not see what additional benefit I shall enjoy after my death that I do not possess now. . . . It is true, after death I shall *see* God, but

as for being united with Him—well, that favor I already enjoy upon earth.”



“How happy I am that I am going to heaven soon! But when I ponder on those words of Our Lord: ‘Behold, I come quickly; and my reward is with me to render to everyman according to his works,’¹ I think to myself He will be very much embarrassed with me, because I have no works! He will be unable, then, to render to me *according to my works*. . . . Oh, well! I am confident He will render to me, therefore, according to *His* own works.”



“If, by an impossibility, God Himself did not perceive my good actions, I should not be troubled on that score. I love Him so much that I would want to be able to make Him happy by my love and by my little sacrifices, without His realizing even that! Since He sees and knows, He is, so to speak, obliged to give me a recompense . . . and I should like to spare Him the trouble!”



¹ Apoc. 22:12.

“I should like to be sent to the Carmel of Hanoi in order to suffer much for God; my desire to go there, if I were cured, springs from a yearning to be all alone, and to have no consolation, no joy upon earth. . . . I know well that God has no need of our works, and I am sure I should be of no service there; but I would *suffer* and I would *love*. It is that which counts in *His* Eyes.”



I mentioned the different practices of devotion or means to reach perfection which are counseled by certain spiritual authors and which discourage many souls.

“As for me,” she answered, “with the exception of the Gospels, I find nothing much in books any more. The Gospel is sufficient for me. I listen with delight to those words of Jesus where He teaches me all I have to do: ‘Learn of me, because I am meek, and humble of heart!’² That sentence gives me peace according to His promise: ‘And you shall find rest to your souls.’”



She had been given a new habit (the one which has been preserved) and she wore it for the first time for

² Matt. 11:29.

Christmas, 1896. It was the second habit she had received since her Clothing. It did not fit her at all, and I asked her if this caused her any annoyance.

“Not a shadow! no more than if it were the habit of a Chinese 2000 leagues away from us,” she replied.



About the novices:

“I throw to my little birds, on the right hand and on the left, the good grain God puts into my hands. And then, let come what will! I am no longer anxious or concerned. Sometimes, it seems as though I had thrown nothing; at other moments it does some good. But the good God says to me: ‘Give, give always, and do not concern yourself about the result.’”



MAY 18, 1897

“On being discharged from all my duties, I have been impressed by the thought that my death will not cause the least inconvenience in the community.”

I said to her: “Do you not feel sad, then, to appear before your sisters as a useless member?”

“... Oh! no, that is the least of my anxieties. . . .”



Seeing how ill she was, I had attempted to obtain a dispensation for her from the Office of the Dead which is prescribed by our Constitutions on the death of each sister of our Order.

Referring to this, she said to me:

“I beg you not to have me dispensed from the Office of the Dead; it is all I can do for the souls of our sisters who may be in purgatory.”



I expressed my surprise over the fact that she never remained idle, notwithstanding her weakened condition. She answered:

“I simply must have some work on hand; in this way, I am not preoccupied with self and never lose my time.”



“Ah! how often I asked God in the past to allow me to follow the exercises of the community until my death! But He has not willed to hear me! It seems to me, however, if I had been allowed to follow them all, I should not have died one minute sooner. I think, too, sometimes, if I had not said anything, no one would have supposed I was sick.”



MAY 19, 1897

“Why are you so merry today?” I inquired.

The Saint answered:

“. . . Because this morning I have had two little pains which were very intense. . . . Nothing gives me a little joy so much as a little pain. . . .”



MAY 20, 1897

“Someone has said I shall fear death; that may well be. If you only knew how slight is my self-assurance! I never depend much on my own thoughts; I know only too well how weak I am, but I want to rejoice at the sentiments God is allowing me to experience now. There will always be time enough to suffer the contrary.”

I showed her one of her photographs.

“Yes,” she smiled, “but . . . that is the *envelope*. When shall we see the *letter*? . . . Oh! how I should like to see that letter!”



FROM MAY 21 TO MAY 26, 1897

“I know I am going to die soon. When? . . . That I do not know. I am like a child who is always being promised a cake. They show it to him from afar . . . then when he approaches to take it, they draw it back! . . . But I am entirely abandoned either to live or to die. If God

so wills it, however, I should be happy to recover and go to Cochin-China.”



“After my death, do not place wreaths on my coffin as was done for Mother Geneviève³ but ask that the money which would have been spent on them be used, rather, to ransom some poor little Negroes from slavery. Say that this it is which will give me pleasure. I should like a little Théophile and a little Marie-Thérèse.”



“At one time, I was much distressed on being obliged to take expensive remedies, but at present I am not disturbed at all. Quite the opposite is the case because I read that Saint Gertrude rejoiced in thinking all would be for the advantage of those who made the gifts. She applied to them those words of our Saviour: ‘As long as you did it to one of these my least brethren, you did it to me.’”⁴



³ Reverend Mother Geneviève of Saint Teresa, foundress of the Carmel of Lisieux.

⁴ Matt. 25:40.

“I am convinced of the uselessness of remedies to cure me, but I have made a compact with the good God that they shall profit, instead, some poor missionaries who have neither time nor means to take care of themselves. I ask Him to use all the care that is bestowed on me to cure them instead.”



“It has been frequently said that I have courage, and how often have I not pondered to myself that such is not the case. But after all, I mused, it will not do to have people telling an untruth, so I set myself, with the help of grace, to acquire some courage. I am like a warrior who, having been congratulated on his bravery, and knowing full well he is little else than a coward, ends by becoming ashamed of undeserved compliments, and sets out to merit them.”



“I much prefer to remain in our cell rather than going down to the infirmary. Here in our cell, no one hears me cough, and I do not disturb anyone. Moreover, when I am too well cared for, *I am no longer able to rejoice.*”



“The Holy Innocents are not infants in heaven, they only have the indefinable charms of child-

hood. They are represented as children merely because we have need of images to comprehend invisible things. . . . Yes, and I am hoping very soon to go to join them myself."



"If I had not had this trial of soul, these temptations against faith which defy description, I truly believe I should die of joy at the thought of quitting this world so soon."



MAY 27, 1897

"It will please me to have a Circular.⁵ I do not quite understand why some sisters ask not to have one. It is sweet to become acquainted with one another and to have a better knowledge of those with whom we shall live together eternally."



We spoke together of her childhood, and I reminded her of this remark my mother made when I was a pupil at the Visitation of Le Mans: "I know nothing so interests you as to have some details of your little sisters, Céline and Thérèse; but I rack my brains to try to find something new to say, and it is sometimes rather difficult."

⁵ After the death of each religious, many Carmels send to all monasteries of the Order a biographical notice in the form of a circular letter.

"I am sure," I added, "Mama magnified and sometimes exaggerated your faults in order to have something interesting to write." Thérèse answered me quite simply:

"I think very likely you are right; it is true, even before the age of three, it was not necessary to chide much in order to correct me. A single word spoken with sweetness was sufficient then, and has been sufficient all my life, to make me understand and repent of my faults."



MAY 28, 1897

"I have no fear of the last combats, nor of the sufferings, however great they may prove to be, of my sickness. God has helped me and has held me by the hand from my childhood's tenderest years, and now I count on His aid. I am sure He will continue to help me to the end. I know well that I may suffer very much, but never *too* much; of that I am certain."



I said to her: "There is an aged sister in the Community who thinks a long life of fidelity in the service of God is always more meritorious and more profitable to souls than one consummated in a short time." She answered:

". . . Oh! I do not share her opinion. Did you notice during the reading in the Refectory the

letter addressed to the mother of St. Aloysius Gonzaga, wherein it is remarked he would not have become more learned or more holy even had he lived to the age of Noah?"



"Last year, toward the month of November, when my departure for Tonkin was projected, do you recall that, so as to have an indication of God's Will, a novena to Théophile Vénard was begun? At the time, I was following all the exercises of the community, and I was even assisting at Matins. Well! It was precisely during that novena I commenced to cough again, and ever since, my health has gone from bad to worse. It was he, then, who called me. Oh! how much I should like to have his portrait! His is a soul I truly love. . . . There are some young saints who are shown to us as being so serious, even during recreation time, but as for him, he was always light-hearted and gay."



"I do not desire more ardently to die than to live. I let the good God choose for me. It is what *He* does that I love."



“Do not think that if I am cured it will embarrass me and upset my plans. Not at all! Age is nothing in the sight of God, and I shall so order myself as always to remain *a little child* even if I am to live a very long time.”



“I always see the bright side of things. Some take everything in such a way as to make the worst of things. It is just the contrary in my case. If there is nothing but pure suffering, if the heavens are so black that I cannot see anything clearly, very well! I make my joy consist precisely in that.”



MAY 29, 1897

She had been suffering very much. I took up the holy Gospels to read a passage to her, and my eyes fell upon these words: “He is risen: he is not here. Behold the place where they laid him.”⁶ She said:

“Yes, it is indeed like that in my case, too; I am no longer, as I used to be in my childhood, a prey to every sorrow. I have been raised up, I am no longer in the place where I once was. Mother, you need not be anxious about me any more; I have reached that point where I cannot suffer

⁶ Mark 16:6.

more, because all suffering has become sweet to me."



MAY 30, 1897

I said to her: "Perhaps you will suffer very much before you die." She answered:

". . . Oh, do not let that trouble you; I have a great desire to suffer much."

June



JUNE 4, 1897

She had taken her last farewell of us (her three sisters) and she now seemed to be transfigured and to suffer no longer. She exclaimed:

“I asked the Blessed Virgin not to let me be so exhausted and abstracted as I had been these last days. I knew very well that my condition was distressing you. And today, Our Lady has heard me. Oh! my little sisters, how happy I am! I see I am going to die soon! I am sure of it now.

“Do not be surprised if I do not appear to you after my death or if you do not receive any extraordinary sign of my happiness. You must remember it is the spirit of my *little way* to wish to see nothing. You well know how many times I have said to the good God, to the angels and saints:

“That not a desire have I
To see them beneath the sky.”

Sister Geneviève of the Holy Face said to her: “The angels will come to fetch you.” Thérèse replied:

“I do not believe you will behold them, but that will be no hindrance to their being there. I should

like to have a beautiful death just to give you pleasure. I have asked this of the Blessed Virgin. To ask something of the Blessed Virgin is not the same as to ask something of the good God. She knows well what to do with my little desires, and it is for her to decide whether to ask for them or not. . . . After all, it is up to her not to force the good God to hear me, but to leave all to His Will.

“. . . I do not know if I am to go to purgatory: I am not in the least troubled about that. But if I do go, I shall not regret having done nothing to avoid it: I shall never repent of having labored wholly for the salvation of souls. How happy I was when I learned our Mother, St. Teresa, had felt the same way about it.

“Do not be troubled if I suffer much, and if, as I said before, you see in me no sign of happiness at the moment of my death. . . . Our Lord died a Victim of Love indeed, and you know well how great was His agony.”



That same day in the afternoon, as I saw that she was suffering much, I said to her: “Ah, well! You have desired to suffer, and God has not forgotten you.”

“. . . I have desired to suffer and I have been heard. I have suffered much these days. . . . One morning during my thanksgiving, I experienced

the very agonies of death, and that without one scrap of consolation!"



"I accept all for the love of God, even the most extravagant thoughts that come to my mind and intrude themselves upon me."



JUNE 5, 1897

"If you should find me dead some morning, do not be in the least disturbed; it will only mean that *papa le bon Dieu* has come to fetch me. Without doubt it is a great grace to receive the Sacraments, but when it does not please God to grant this favor, that is equally a grace. . . . Everything is a grace."



"I thank you for having asked that I may be given only a particle of the Sacred Host. I had great difficulty in swallowing even that. But how happy I was to have the good God in my heart! I wept then as I wept on the day of my First Communion."



"See how little consolation is given me regarding my temptations against faith! The chaplain

said to me today: 'Do not dwell upon them for they are very dangerous.'

"Then he said to me: 'Are you quite resigned to die?'

"I answered him: 'Ah, Father, I find that I need rather to be resigned to live. I experience, on the other hand, only joy at the thought of death.'

"In my childhood the great events of my life appeared to me to be far off, as inaccessible as the mountains. When I saw the little girls make their First Communion I said to myself: 'How shall I make my First Communion?' . . . Later on: 'How shall I enter Carmel?' . . . And then . . . 'How shall I receive the habit, and when shall I make my Profession? . . .' Now I say the same thing about dying."



JUNE 7, 1897

She went for a walk in the garden, while I supported her. On returning, she stopped to look at a little white hen sheltering its little ones beneath its wings. Her eyes then filled with tears.

"You are crying?" I asked.

She answered:

"I cannot speak now as I am too deeply moved."

Later, with a heavenly expression on her face, she confided to me:

"I wept thinking that God has chosen to give this comparison, in the Gospel, to make us understand His tenderness. All my life He has done that for me, He has covered me entirely with His wings. I am so deeply moved I cannot contain myself, my heart is overflowing with love and thankfulness. Ah! God has done exceedingly well to hide Himself from me and to show me but rarely, and as if 'through the lattices,'¹ the effects of His mercy. . . ."



In showing me the picture of Our Lady of Victories to which she had attached the little white flower of which she speaks in her *Autobiography*, she said to me with emotion:

"It is ten years ago today that Papa gave me that little white flower, when I spoke to him the first time about my vocation. . . ."



JUNE 9, 1897

On the second anniversary of her Offering of herself to God's all-merciful Love, she exclaimed:

"How happy I am today!"

"Has the trial of your soul passed then?" I asked.

¹ Cant. 2:9.

“ . . . No, but it seems as if something was suspended; the hateful serpents no longer hiss in my ears,” she answered.



She confided to me:

“I remain in great peace when I hear the nuns say that I am getting better! Last week, when I was able to stand up, they judged me, nevertheless, to be very ill. This week, on the other hand, when I cannot even support myself alone, they believe me to be on the road to recovery! But what does it matter what they say?”

“Do you still expect, then, to die very soon?” I inquired.

“Yes,” she answered, “I expect to go very soon; certainly I am not getting better. My side aches very much. However, I always say: even if God cures me I shall not have been under any illusion.

“It is said in the Gospel that the good God will come as a *thief*. So, He is coming soon to *steal* me! I am so anxious to assist Him in every way!”

Sister Marie of the Sacred Heart (her eldest sister) said to her: “How sad we shall be after your death!”

“ . . . Oh, no! you will see that it will be like

a shower of roses," she replied. "Yes, *I shall send down a shower of roses.*"



"I am like a little child at the railway station who is waiting for his father and mother to put him into the train. Alas, they do not come, and the train departs! But there are others, and I shall not miss them all. . . ."



JUNE 10, 1897

"I very often ask the Blessed Virgin to tell the good God that He does not have to inconvenience Himself on my account. . . . She will take care of my commissions. I no longer understand anything about my illness, however. Imagine—at present I am improving in health! But, I abandon myself—and then I am happy. What would become of me if I cherished the hope of dying soon? What disappointment! But I do not have any because I am happy with whatever the good God sends and I desire only His will."



JUNE 14, 1897

"From moment to moment we can bear so much."

JUNE 15, 1897

“On the 9th I was able to see clearly afar off the lighthouse which showed me the harbor of heaven, but now I see nothing; I am like someone whose eyes are blindfolded. Whatever anyone says to me about my approaching death no longer makes any impression on me. God, without doubt, does not will I should think about my death in the same way I thought about it before my illness. At that time the thought was very necessary and profitable to me, of that I am certain. But today it is the contrary; He wills me so to abandon myself as to be altogether like a little child who is not disturbed by whatever is done with him.”



I asked her: “Are you wearied on seeing your life is prolonged and there is so much to suffer?”

“ . . . To suffer! But that pleases me!” she cried.

“Why?” I inquired.

“ . . . Because that is what is pleasing to God.”



“I am so happy. It seems to me I have not offended God at all during my sickness. Recently,

when I was writing about charity,² the sisters used to come to me and I was frequently interrupted. I tried not to show the least impatience, so as to be the first to put into practice that about which I was writing.”



JUNE 22, 1897

She was in the garden in an invalid's wheel chair, and, when I came to her in the afternoon, she said to me:

“How well I understand those words of our Saviour to our Holy Mother, St. Teresa: ‘Do you know, My daughter, those who truly love Me? They are those who recognize that all which is not related to Me is nought but illusion.’ Oh! how true it is! Yes, all beside God is altogether vanity.”



JUNE 23, 1897

I said to her: “Alas! I shall have nothing to give God at my death; I shall have empty hands, and that makes me very sad.”

She answered:

“Well, indeed! You are not like me, and yet I am in the same state. All the same, if I should have accomplished all the works of St. Paul, I should still consider myself an ‘unprofitable serv-

²In the *Autobiography*.

ant.’³ I should find that I had empty hands; but it is precisely that which gives me joy, for, having nothing, I shall receive everything from God.”



JUNE 25, 1897

She showed me in the *Annals of the Propagation of the Faith* a passage where there is mention of the apparition of a saint clothed in white at the side of a newly baptized child, and she said to me:

“Later on I shall be standing like that beside the little baptized infants. . . .”



JUNE 26, 1897

“How painful my side was yesterday! And behold today the pain has passed away! Ah! when shall I go to be with the good God! How much I should like to go to heaven!”



JUNE 29, 1897

“How unhappy I should be in heaven, if I could not provide little pleasures for those I love on earth!”



³ Luke 17:10.

In the evening she was suffering much from her trial of temptation against faith. Moreover, certain reflections made to her had caused her pain. She said to me:

“My soul is an exile indeed, heaven is shut against me, and from the side of earth there are trials also.

“. . . I know very well that they do not believe I am very ill, but it is the good God who permits this. . . .”



“I shall be pleased in heaven if you compose some pretty verses for me. It seems to me that it gives pleasure to the saints when we celebrate their praises, because in honoring them, we honor God.”



JUNE 30, 1897

I spoke to her of those saints who, like St. Simeon Stylites, had extraordinary lives. She said to me:

“Ah! without doubt all that is very admirable, but I prefer those saints who, by their abandonment to God, have triumphed over all disquietude, like St. Cecilia, who went on to her marriage and was without any fear all the same. . . .”



Referring to a visit in the parlor, where according to her habit she had said almost nothing, leaving her sisters to do the talking, she remarked:

“How timid I was this afternoon in the parlor! And yet almost directly afterward I very severely reprehended a novice; I really did not recognize myself! What contrasts there are in my character! . . . My timidity springs from an extreme uneasiness I experience when people concern themselves about me.”



July



JULY 3, 1897

I confided to her my thoughts of sadness and discouragement after a fault with which I reproached myself.

“. . . As for me, I never allow myself to be discouraged. When I commit a fault that makes me sad, I know well the sadness is the consequence of my unfaithfulness. But do you think that I rest there? Oh, no! Straightway I hasten to say to God: ‘My God, I know that I have deserved this feeling of sadness I experience; meanwhile let me offer it to You all the same as an ordeal You have sent me—through *love*. I am sorry for what I have done, but I am glad to have this suffering to offer to You.’”

She had been much grieved on a certain occasion and to distract her thoughts she asked with great sweetness:

“I have need of some nourishment for my soul. Read me something from the life of a saint.”

“Would you like the life of St. Francis of Assisi?” I asked. “That would please you; he speaks of flowers and little birds!”

"No, not for that . . . but rather to have examples of humility," she answered seriously.



With a joyous resignation she exclaimed:

"Even the saints have abandoned me. I asked St. Anthony during Matins to help me to find the handkerchief I had lost. Do you think he heard me? Of course not! But that is nothing, and I told him I loved him just the same."



JULY 4, 1897

"Our Lord died on the cross in the midst of anguish, and there, nevertheless, was the most glorious death of love the world has ever seen! To die of love, that is not to die in transports. . . . I tell you quite frankly it seems to me I am undergoing a similar experience."



JULY 5, 1897

I spoke to her of my imperfections. She replied:

"It happens to me often enough also to fail thus, but I am never astonished at it. I am not always able to put aside the nothings of earth as promptly as I would wish; for example, I am tempted to

feel disquieted over some silly thing I might have said or done. Then I enter into myself and say: 'Alas, I am once more at the first step as before!' But this I say in great peace, without sadness. It is so sweet to feel oneself to be little and weak."



"Do not feel sad at seeing me so ill, Little Mother, for you see how happy the good God makes me. I am always cheerful and contented."



JULY 6, 1897

She was coughing and hemorrhaging, and I said to her: "Do you think you are going to leave us, then?" She answered:

"Oh, no! . . . The chaplain said to me: 'You will have to make a great sacrifice in leaving your sisters,' and I replied: 'Father, I do not think I am really leaving them for I shall be much nearer them after my death.'"



"Just as I have been obliged to practice patience while awaiting all the other great events of my life, so is it now in my expectation of death. I entered Carmel young, and yet, after all had been

decided, it happened that there was a three months' delay; for receiving the habit there was a similar delay; for my profession, another postponement! Very well, for my death it will be the same: it will come in good time, but I must await it a little longer."



"I am making very many little sacrifices."



I said to her: "It is quite evident that you are very happy today because you have had a hemorrhage and believe the Divine Thief is in sight."

"... Ah! even though I should not see Him, I love Him so much that I am always pleased with whatever He does," she answered sweetly. "I will not love Him less if He fails to come to steal me away—quite the contrary. When He appears to have deceived me, I make Him all sorts of compliments, so that really He does not know what to do with me."



"I read this beautiful passage in the *Reflections on the Imitation of Christ*: 'Our Lord in the Garden of Olives enjoyed all the delights of the Blessed Trinity, yet His agony was nonetheless cruel.'

That is a mystery, but I assure you that I understand something of it, through that which I am experiencing myself.”



“I have often noticed that experience of suffering makes us kind and indulgent toward others because it is suffering that draws us near to God.”



I was burning a lamp in honor of Our Lady, asking that the hemorrhaging might cease. Thérèse sweetly chided:

“You are not happy then that I am dying! As for me, I rejoice that the hemoptysis is continuing. However, it is over for today!”



“When will the Last Judgment come? . . . Oh! how I wish it could be at this very moment! . . .
“ . . . and then, what will follow?”



JULY 7, 1897

She had a fresh hemorrhage, and later confided to me:

“I am going to see the good God very soon!”

“Now that death is so near, have you any fear of it?”
I asked.

“... Ah! less and less,” she answered reassuringly.

“Haven’t you any fear of the Thief, now that He is at the door?” I queried.

“... No, He is not at the door,” she replied, in a cheerful tone. “He has actually come in! But what are you asking me, Little Mother? Have I any fear of the Thief? How could I be afraid of the One I love so much!”



“Those words: ‘Although he should kill me, I will trust in him,’¹ have fascinated me ever since childhood. But it took me a long time to become established in that degree of abandonment. Now I am there, however. The good God just took me in His Arms and placed me there!”



I tried to persuade her to say a few words of edification to the community physician, but all to no avail.

“Ah! Mother!” she sighed, “that is not my way at all. Monsieur de Cornière [the physician’s name] will have to think what he will: I love nothing so much as simplicity. I have a horror of all that

¹ Job 13:15.

is opposed to it, and, I assure you, to do what you ask would be a fault on my part."



I asked her again about the grace she had received after her Offering to the all-merciful Love of God. . . . She prefaced her remarks with:

"Little Mother, I told you all about it on the day itself, but you paid no attention. . . ."

(That was true. Exteriorly, I had attached no importance to it at all, and Thérèse never introduced the subject with me again.)

"Well," she confided, "I was commencing the Stations of the Cross in the Choir that day when, suddenly, I felt that I had been wounded by a dart of fire so ardent that death must be near. I have no words to describe it; it was as though an invisible hand had plunged me wholly into fire. And such fire! Yet, at the same time, what sweetness! I was burning up with love, and was convinced that to withstand such an onslaught of love for one minute, nay, for even one second more, was impossible; death must certainly ensue. It was an experimental knowledge of those states described by the saints, and which some of them had so frequently experienced. But such a grace

was mine only once—and, even then, for one instant only. Almost immediately after, I fell back into my habitual state of aridity.”

Later she added:

“It is true that from the age of fourteen on I had experienced some other assaults of love, and in those states I did, indeed, love God in an extraordinary way. But such assaults were nothing when compared with that grace accompanying my Offering to God’s merciful Love, when actually I felt myself enveloped by a veritable flame.”



JULY 8, 1897

She was very sick, and we spoke of giving her Extreme Unction. . . . In the evening, when she was brought down to the Infirmary, she exclaimed joyfully:

“I fear only one thing—that all this may change.”



Looking at her emaciated hands, she said:

“I have already become a skeleton. But this realization makes me very happy.”



“Yes, indeed, I shall weep for joy and love when going to meet the good God. . . . But, then, are

we to weep on entering heaven? . . . There must be tears, nevertheless, for has He not said He would 'wipe away all tears from their eyes.'"²



When preparing for confession before Extreme Unction, she searched with me for the sins she might have committed through the senses. Her extreme delicacy of conscience prompted her to ask my opinion about this particular circumstance in her life:

"I recall," she said, "that once when I was on a journey, I used some Cologne water with too much natural satisfaction. . . ."



With much sweetness she recalled an occasion when she was not understood, and added:

"Our Lady kept everything in her heart. Surely they cannot blame me for acting like her."



She was aware that some of the sisters did not believe her to be in danger of death. And when she said:

"I have such an ardent desire to receive Extreme Unction, even though it will be all the worse for me if they judge unfavorably about it later," she

² Apoc. 21:4

was referring here to her possible restoration to health.



She was feeling a little better and said playfully:

“You might think the little angels had entered into a conspiracy to hide the light that was convincing me the end was near.”

“Have they succeeded in hiding the Blessed Mother, too?” I inquired.

“No,” she rejoined, “the Blessed Virgin will never be hidden from me, for I love her too much for that to happen.”



We were expressing our gratitude for the consolation her affectionate words afforded us.

“My little sisters,” she answered, “I offer you the fruits of joy the good God has given me.

“In heaven, I hope to obtain an abundance of grace for those who have benefited me. As for you, Mother, you will not even be able to make use of all I shall send to you. There will be very much to make you rejoice.”



“If you only knew how sweetly I shall be judged. Nevertheless, if God did chide me a little, I should

find it sweet all the same. And even should I be sent to purgatory I would still be happy and would, like the three Hebrew children, sing canticles of Love in the midst of the fiery furnace. If, in that way, I were able to deliver some other souls and suffer in their place, how happy I should be, for then I would be doing good by *delivering the captives.*"



She warned me that, later on, a great number of young priests would ask for a spiritual sister, after they had learned she herself had filled that office for two missionaries. She pointed out that this might be dangerous for certain souls.

"Never mind," she continued, "if some other nun writes as I have written and receives the same compliments, the same confidences. . . . It is by prayer and sacrifice alone that we can be useful to the Church. Such correspondence should be extremely rare, and for certain religious it ought not to be allowed at all. I mean that type of soul who would become preoccupied by it and think she was working marvels, whereas in reality she might be only wounding her own soul and perhaps falling into the snares of the devil. Mother! what I am saying is very important: do not forget it later on.

“At Carmel we must not coin false lucre to purchase souls. And fine words written and fine words received are often only an exchange of counterfeit coin.”



JULY 9, 1897

Our Father Superior had come to decide about administering Extreme Unction, and he said to her: “You! going to heaven so soon? You have not by any means earned your crown; you have only just begun.” She answered:

“. . . Ah, Father, what you say is only too true. No, I have not as yet earned my crown, but the good God has won it for me instead.”

All during that visit she succeeded so well in remaining cheerful and agreeable (in spite of her suffering) that there was no longer question of her reception of the Sacrament which she had yearned so ardently to receive. Later, when I mentioned to her that she evidently did not know the proper *tactics* for gaining one's point, she gently replied:

“I do not know that trade.”



Someone had told her she was indeed privileged to be without any fear of death. She said:

“. . . But why should I be preserved from the

fear of death more than anyone else? I am not boasting like St. Peter: 'I will not deny thee.'"³



JULY 10, 1897

We said to her: "There are some saints who had the fear of damnation. How is it that you also are not afraid of being lost?" With loving assurance she answered:

"Little children do not damn themselves."



Although she was suffering intensely, she began to wonder if she was as seriously ill as the doctor believed. She then confided to me:

"If I were not completely abandoned to the will of God, if my soul allowed itself to be overwhelmed by those ever-exchanging sentiments of joy and sadness that shuttle us through this exile, I should be submerged in a flood of very bitter sorrow, indeed. But such alternations reach only the surface of my soul. Still, they are great trials!"



In Thérèse's presence one of the nuns referred to those facial contortions often visible at the moment of death. The Saint responded:

³ Matt. 26:35.

"If that happens in my case, do not distress yourselves, for immediately after death I shall be all smiles!"



Sister Geneviève of the Holy Face had mentioned that the representation of an infant's pretty little head she had seen on the cover of a baptismal case would be a good model for an angel's head. Our little Saint was very anxious to see the picture, but since no one thought of showing it to her, she made the sacrifice and did not refer to it at all. She confided this to me later.



JULY II, 1897

I entered into conversation with her about the manuscript of her *Autobiography* and of the profit many souls would derive from it. She answered:

" . . . It will be clearly seen, however, that all comes from God. My share in the glory will be a gratuitous gift which does not belong to me. Everybody will be convinced of this. . . ."



She was conversing with me about the Communion of Saints, and showed how the merits of each individual soul make for the happiness of the others. She concluded:

"Just as a mother glories in her children, so shall

we be proud of one another in heaven without the least shadow of jealousy.”



Again about the manuscript of her *Autobiography*:

“... Some persons might think that it is only because I have been preserved from mortal sin that I have such great confidence in God. Make it quite clear, Mother, to all that even if I had committed every possible crime, my confidence would remain unshaken, for I should then feel that all the multitude of my offences would vanish as a drop of water cast into a fiery furnace. It would also be well to relate this story of a converted sinner who died of love. People will lend a willing ear at once, and this example will encourage them.”

This is the story exactly as she related it to me:

“It is related in the *Lives of the Fathers of the Desert* that one of them converted a woman who was a public sinner, and whose evil life had scandalized the entire countryside. Touched by grace, that poor sinner followed the Saint into the desert, there to accomplish a rigorous penance. On the very first night of the journey, however, even be-

fore she had come to the place of her self-imposed solitude, her earthly ties were snapped by the violence of her repentant love. At that very moment the holy man saw her soul being carried by angels up to the very bosom of God. This is a striking example of what I mean, but such things defy description. . . .”



She was suffering much from her temptations against faith and was also, physically, very weak. Then she began to recite this strophe of her canticle to the Blessed Mother entitled: *Why I Love Thee, Mary*:

“Since Heaven’s high King has willed it so, His
Mother and His dearest,
Should know the anguish of that night, the torn
heart’s deepest woe,
Then are not those who suffer thus, to Mary’s
heart the nearest,
And is not love in suffering God’s highest gift
below?
All, all that He has given me, oh! tell Him He
may take it,
Tell Him, dear Mother, He may do whate’er He
please with me:
That He may bruise my heart today, and make
it sore and break it,

So that only through eternity my eyes His Face
may see!"



I said to her: "How much the good God has favored
you! What do you think of such predilection?"

She answered:

"... I simply think that the Spirit of God
breathes where He wills. . . ."



She reminded me of some of the extraordinary graces
she had received in prayer in the past, of those summer
evenings during the Great Silence,⁴ and told me she un-
derstood by experience what the "flight of the spirit"
means.⁵ She spoke further of a grace of this kind she
had received in the garden grotto of St. Mary Magdalen
in July of 1889. This grace was followed by several days
of "quietude." She concluded:

"... It was as if a veil had been thrown over
me hiding all the things of earth. . . . I seemed
to be entirely hidden beneath the veil of the Blessed
Virgin. At the time, I had charge of the Refectory,
and I performed my actions as though I performed
them not. It was as if I were acting in a borrowed
body. I remained in this state for an entire week.

⁴ The hour after Compline, 8 to 9, preceding the recitation of
Matins.

⁵ St. Teresa of Avila, *The Interior Castle*. 6th Mansion, chap 5.

It is a supernatural state, very difficult to explain. God alone can bring it about, and such a grace suffices sometimes to detach a soul forever from this world."



JULY 12, 1897

"I keep nothing stored up. All I have and all the merits I acquire are for the Church and for souls. Were I to live to be eighty, I should always remain poor."



She related to me how once, when she was second portress, she underwent a very severe interior struggle because of a night lamp someone ordered her to prepare for the outside quarters in a circumstance that was unfortunate. Moreover, there was nothing at hand to assist her in the work. The struggle was so violent that, in order not to give way, she implored God's help with great insistence. She then expended her very best efforts upon it, and consecrated to the task the hour of the Great Silence before Matins. She added:

"To conquer myself I directed my interior intention to the Blessed Virgin and the Infant Jesus as though I were preparing the night lamp for them. Then I accomplished the task with the most unbelievable care, not leaving a single grain of dust on it, and gradually a great tranquility and a sur-

passing sweetness invaded my soul. The signal for Matins came, and I could not answer it at once; but I had received such a grace that if Sister X had come and told me, for example, that I had made a mistake and must prepare another night lamp, I should have obeyed her with transcending happiness. Beginning from that day, I resolved never to stop at the consideration whether things commanded are reasonable or not.”



“If you could begin your life over again,” she was asked, “what would you do?” She answered:

“. . . It seems to me I should do just as I have done in the past.”



“God will have to grant all my wishes in heaven because I have never done my own will on earth.”



“You will look down on us from on high, will you not?” she was asked. She answered:

“. . . No, I shall *come* down.”



“I do not say: ‘If it be hard to live in Carmel, it is sweet to die there,’ but rather ‘If it is sweet to live in Carmel, it is sweeter still to die there.’”



Someone offered her a glass of some strengthening wine. She smiled.

“I no longer wish for the wine of earth. . . . I desire to ‘drink with you new in the kingdom of my Father.’”⁶



“I beg you to make an act of love of God and an invocation to all the saints. . . . They are all my relatives up there.”



She spoke again about the Communion of Saints.

“With the virgins, we shall be like virgins; with the doctors, we shall be like doctors; with the martyrs, we shall be like martyrs, because all the saints are our relatives. But those who have followed the way of spiritual childhood will always retain the charms of childhood.”



⁶ Matt. 26:29.

“From my childhood, God has given me a most intimate presentiment that I should die young.”



“God has always inspired me to desire that which He wished to give me.”



She said to her sisters:

“Do not think that when I am in heaven you will have nothing but joys. Such has not been my lot nor have I desired that it should be. You will, on the contrary, probably have many severe trials, but I shall win for you the light and grace to appreciate and love them so that you will be compelled to repeat with me: ‘For thou hast given me, O Lord, a delight in thy doings.’”⁷



“I cannot dwell long on the thought of the happiness awaiting me in heaven. One expectation alone makes my heart beat fast: it is the love I shall receive and the love I shall be able to give. . . . I am thinking about all the wonderful things I should like to do after my death: to baptize little

⁷Ps. 91:5.

children, to aid priests and missionaries, and to assist the entire Church. . . .”



“This evening I was listening to some distant music, and I began to think that very soon I should be listening to other incomparable melodies, but this consolation was but a fleeting one.”



“If I had been rich, it would have been impossible for me to see a poor man hungry without giving him straightway something of my goods. So also in the measure that I gain any spiritual treasure, at once do I think of those souls who are in danger of falling into hell. I shower upon them all I possess, and I have never yet found a moment when I could say: ‘Now I am going to work for my own spiritual welfare.’”



“All the good God has given me has always pleased me, even when there was question of those things which seemed less good and less delightful than were given to others.”



“My heart is filled to the brim with the love of God, so whenever anything else is poured in, it does not penetrate, but glides off easily. It is like oil which cannot mingle with water. In the depths of my soul, I always remain in a profound peace which nothing can disturb.”



Her accent and expression were truly sublime as she recited for me this strophe of her canticle *Remember Thou*:

“Remember that Thy Holy Will alone
 Is all my peace, my only happiness.
 I yield myself to Thee, my very own,
 Within Thy Arms with only a power to bless.
 But if Thou seemest to sleep while raging waves
 beat high,
 In peace I shall remain without one anguished
 cry.
 In peace on Thee I wait,
 But for th’ awakening great
 Prepare me now.”



Noticing that her body was becoming emaciated, she said to me:

“Oh! what a joyful experience it is for me to see my body undergoing this destruction!”

JULY 13, 1897

“. . . During the years of Papa's illness, whenever Céline (Sister Geneviève) came to the parlor for her visit, I could never manage to say all I desired to say in the space of a half-hour. Then if I felt bad over something I had forgotten, or if there were some spiritual light I was longing to share with her, I confided it to Our Lord and asked Him to make it known to her Himself. Invariably, at the next visit, I would see clearly He had heard my prayer completely. . . . In the beginning, when her sorrow was at its height, I used to go away from the parlor brokenhearted when I had not succeeded in consoling her. But soon the light broke in on my soul, and I understood, after all, that of myself I was incapable of consoling any soul. Thereafter, I was not in the least distressed whenever she went away sad, for I simply asked Jesus then to supply for my powerlessness.

“Ever since that time, whenever it happens that I involuntarily cause pain to anyone, I simply ask God to pass by after me, and I do not worry any more about the matter.”



I asked her to tell me exactly her assigned tasks during her years at Carmel. This was her reply:

“At my entrance, I was placed with Mother Sub-Prioress,⁸ who was in charge of the linen. In addition, I had to sweep a staircase and a dormitory. It was during this period that I was sent out each afternoon at half-past four to pull up the weeds in the garden, which so displeased Our Mother.

“After my Clothing, I worked in the Refectory until I was eighteen; I swept it and poured out the water and the beer. At the Forty Hours’ Devotion in 1891, I was sent to the Sacristy. From June of the following year I was without any assigned task for the space of two months. It was during that period I painted the fresco around the Tabernacle in the Oratory, and I was also companion to the Depository at the time. At the end of those two months, I was sent to the Turn while continuing to work in the art-room. I remained at these two assignments until the elections of 1896 when I returned to the Sacristy work. Later I became seriously ill, and it was then that I asked to help Sister X in mending the linen.”

⁸The Mother Sub-Prioress to whom Thérèse refers is Sister Marie of the Angels, her Novice Mistress, who died on November 24, 1924.

She reminded me quite humbly how some of the nuns had said in the past that she was slow about her work and but little devoted to the offices assigned to her, which was not actually the case. She added that their observations about her, however, even made me wonder, for a short time, if they were right. There were other particular circumstances, she continued, causing her suffering, when, for instance, she was my assistant in the Refectory work. She could not be intimate with me any longer, and this was a source of continual suffering to her. Through a spirit of self-sacrifice she did not allow herself to seek this permission (to lay bare the secrets of her soul to me), which would have been readily granted. And she sighed:

“It seemed as though you no longer knew me!”

She told me, moreover, of the violence to self she had to exercise when removing spiders from the alcove of St. Alexis (a little corner near the Refectory; it was under the staircase), for she always had a great natural repugnance to spiders. Other similar details she gave made me realize how faithful she had been in everything and how severely she had suffered without others' suspecting it in the least.



JULY 14, 1897

“Some time ago I read that the Israelites, when building the walls of Jerusalem, labored with one hand while holding a sword in the other. We should act like that, and never give ourselves over wholly to any work in which we are engaged.”

JULY 15, 1897

One of the nuns said to her: "Perhaps you will die tomorrow, the feast of Our Lady of Mount Carmel, after Holy Communion." She replied:

"Oh! that does not resemble my *little way* in the least. . . . Would you want me to leave this little way, then, in order to die? . . . To die after Holy Communion! For me that would be too nice: little souls could not imitate me there . . . unless, of course, my death were to take place *accidentally* tomorrow morning!"

She then related to me a story about Blessed Théophane Vénard when he was on his way to martyrdom. In his hand he held the pyx containing the Sacred Host which he intended to receive as his last Communion. Suddenly the pyx was wrenched from his hand, and he saw his executioners carrying it off. . . . (Thérèse then heaved a deep sigh.)



The remembrance of the following incident always brought a special grace to the Saint, and she gave me these details:

"Sister Marie of the Eucharist [her cousin, Marie Guérin] had no matches to light the candles for a procession. Although there was only a feeble glimmer on the burnt wick of the little lamp at

the relic shrine, Sister Marie succeeded in lighting her candle from that little spark. Her candle in turn served to light the candles of all the nuns in the community. And I thought to myself: 'Who, then, can glory in his own works? . . . As a dying ember, that little lamp was able to produce those sturdy little flames, which, in turn, could have continued imparting life to innumerable others until the entire world was drawn within its circuit. Yet, it would always be that humble little lamp that was the first cause of all that flame. . . ?

"It is the same with the Communion of Saints. Yes, one very little spark can produce great lights in the Church, like the Doctors and Martyrs. Without being aware of it, the graces and lights we receive are often due to some hidden soul, because God wills the saints to communicate grace to one another by prayer. In this way, they will all love one another with a stronger love in heaven, a love that will be greater even than that of a family, and even of the most ideal family on earth.

"Often, very often, I have thought perhaps all the graces I have received are due to the prayers of some little soul who obtained them from God for me. And I may never know that soul until I reach heaven."



“ . . . In heaven, there will be no indifferent glances or attitudes because all the elect will remember that they owe to one another the graces that have merited for them their reward.”



JULY 16, 1897

Speaking of a desire that had been granted to have Céline (Sister Geneviève of the Holy Face) near her at Carmel, Thérèse said:

“I had made a complete sacrifice concerning Sister Geneviève, but I cannot say that I no longer desired to have her enter here. Often in the summer, during the hour of Great Silence before Matins, when I was on the terrace, I used to think to myself: ‘Oh, if only my Céline were here, right beside me! . . . But then that would be too great a happiness!’ And it seemed an impossible dream. It was not, however, to please nature that I desired this happiness. It was, rather, in the interests of Céline’s soul, and that she might follow my *little way*. And when I now realize that not only has she entered, but has been given over entirely to me for instruction, and when I see how God so infinitely surpasses my desires, it is then I truly understand how tremendously He loves me.

“And so, Little Mother, if a desire that was

hardly expressed has been so gloriously fulfilled, it is impossible that those other great desires I constantly recommend to God should not also be perfectly accomplished.”



Early in the month of July she had finished the work on the manuscript of her *Autobiography*.⁹ About the manuscript she said to me:

“Mother, you must revise all I have written. If you find it necessary to omit some things, or to add anything I have said *viva voce*, it will be the same as if I had done this myself. Remember this later on, and do not have any scruple in the matter.

“You know all the innermost recesses of my soul, you alone. . . .”



“Mother, in the manuscript I scarcely said two words on the subject of God’s justice. But you will find an expression of my true thought on the matter in one of my letters to Father Roulland,¹⁰ where all is explained clearly.”



⁹ The last pages of her manuscript were written in pencil. Sometimes her physical weakness made it difficult for her to write at all, even in pencil.

¹⁰ One of her “spiritual” brothers.

“The great saints have labored for the glory of God, but I, who am only a very little soul, work only to give Him pleasure. I should be happy to bear the greatest sufferings if only to gain His smile, even once.”



JULY 17, 1897

“I feel that my mission is about to begin; my mission of making souls love the good God as I love Him, to teach my *little way* to souls. If my desires receive fulfillment, I shall spend my heaven on earth even until the end of time.

“Yes, *I will spend my heaven doing good upon earth*. That is not impossible, since from the midst of the Beatific Vision Itself the angels watch over us.

“No, I shall not be able to take any rest until the end of the world, as long as there are souls to be saved. But when the angel shall declare, ‘Time shall be no longer,’¹¹ then shall I take my rest, because the number of the elect will be complete, and all souls shall have entered into their joy and their rest. My heart thrills at that thought.”

I asked her for some explanations about her *way* and just how she desired to teach souls about it after her death. She answered:

¹¹ Apoc. 10:6.

“Mother, it is the way of spiritual childhood, the path of confidence and total abandonment. I would show them the little method I have found so perfectly successful, and tell them there is but one thing to do on earth: to cast before Jesus the flowers of little sacrifices. That is what I have done, and that is why I shall be so well received.”



“Shortly after the chaplain’s visit with me, Sister Marie of the Sacred Heart saw him in the parlor. When I met her later, I had a strong inclination to ask her what the chaplain had said about my spiritual condition. I believed it would, perhaps, benefit and console me to know. But on reflection I said: ‘This is curiosity. I will not make any inquiry about it. Since God did not inspire her to vouch any information of her own accord that is a sign He does not wish me to know it.’ And I purposely avoided directing our conversation into that channel. I feared that Sister Marie of the Sacred Heart might be, so to say, forced to tell me; and then I should not be happy about it. . . .”



JULY 18, 1897

“. . . God would not have given me the desire to do good upon earth after my death if He did

not will to realize it; He would rather have given me the desire instead to rest in Him. What do you think of that, Little Mother?"



To Sister Marie of the Sacred Heart, who had said to her: "The thought that you are going to die throws me into a state of prostration; if I yielded to my inclinations I would speak no more to anyone," Thérèse answered:

"That would not be according to the law of the Gospel. No matter what the circumstance, we must make ourselves all things to all."



"Rejoice! You will very soon be freed from the pains of this life," said one of her sisters.

"Rejoice at that! Oh! no . . ."

And regarding her with an ingenuous smile:

". . . I who am such a valiant soldier! . . ."



Sister Geneviève of the Holy Face was reading for her a conference on eternal beatitude; suddenly Thérèse interrupted her:

"It is not that which attracts me . . ."

"What, then?"

"Oh, it is love! To love and to be loved and to return to earth to make Love to be loved! . . ."



JULY 20, 1897

"What would you have done if one of us (her three sisters) had been sick instead of you? Would you have come to the Infirmary during the time of recreation?"

" . . . I should have gone directly to recreation without asking any news of you, but I should have done it so simply that no one would have noticed my sacrifice. If I had been called to the Infirmary, I should have purified my intention and gone to give you pleasure, and not for my own satisfaction. Thus I should draw down graces upon you which I should not have obtained by self-seeking. And personally I should have gained great strength from my own self-sacrifice. If sometimes, through weakness, I should have done otherwise than I had determined, I should not have been discouraged, but would have endeavored to repair my failure by denying myself still more without its being noticed."



"I am happy to die in the arms of Our Mother,¹²

¹² Mother Marie of Gonzaga.

because she represents God. With you, perhaps there would have been something of natural feeling; I much prefer that which is wholly supernatural.”



We wished to profit by her last days on earth to ask her about many things.

“When I am harassed with questions, it makes me think of Joan of Arc before her tribunal. It seems to me that I answer with the same sincerity.”



JULY 21, 1897

“I have never acted like Pilate, who refused to listen to the truth. I have always said to God: ‘I wish to hear You attentively, I beseech You to answer me when I ask You humbly: What is truth? Make me see things exactly as they are, that nothing may dazzle me.’”



She reminded me of that prayer which she had loved to repeat so often at the time of her First Communion: “O Jesus, ineffable sweetness, change into bitterness for me all the consolations of earth,”¹³ and she added:

¹³ *Imitation of Christ*, III, xxxvi, 3.

“. . . Yet I did not pray to be deprived of divine consolation, but only of those joys and illusions which so often turn the soul away from God.”



I was telling her that she was very fortunate to have been chosen by God to show to other souls the way of love and confidence.

She answered:

“What does it matter whether it is I or another who reveals that way to souls? Provided they be shown, what matters the instrument?”



JULY 22, 1897

“I have never given God aught but love, and He will repay me with love.”



JULY 23, 1897

“You are suffering much; perhaps you will suffer much more . . . that thought gives us such pain! . . .” She replied:

“We who run in the way of love ought not to think of sorrows the future may bring, for then there is a lack of confidence, and that is how we confuse ourselves with fancies and imaginations.”



"*In te Domine speravi!*"¹⁴ At the time of our great family trial [her father's illness], how happy I was when it was my turn to say that verse in the choir."



Someone had sent her from outside some delicious fruits, but she was unable to eat them. She took them up one by one, as if to offer them to someone, and said:

"The Holy Family has been well served. St. Joseph and the little Jesus have each had a peach and two plums. And the Blessed Virgin has had her portion also.

"When they give me milk with a little rum I offer it to St. Joseph. I say to myself: 'Oh, that will be very good for poor St. Joseph!' In the Refectory I had special rubrics for offering up different foods which came to me: the sweet was for little Jesus, the strong for St. Joseph, the Blessed Virgin had the hot portions and the ripest fruit. But when something was lacking to me, I was all the better pleased, because then I had indeed *given* it to the Holy Family."



JULY 25, 1897

I confessed to her that I should end by wishing her to die, so that I might not see her suffering so much.

¹⁴ "In thee, O Lord, have I trusted!"

"You ought not to say that, Little Mother, because to suffer is exactly that which pleases me in life," she answered.



"Where is the Divine Thief now? He is not spoken of any more. . . ."

She replied, placing her hand on her heart:

"He is here! He is in my heart. . . ."



I said that in appearance death is very sad, and remarked how grieved I should be on seeing her dead. She answered very affectionately:

"The Blessed Virgin indeed held the dead body of Jesus on her knees, disfigured, bloodstained. That is quite a different thing from what you will see. Ah, I do not know how she did it! . . . If they brought me to you in that state, I wonder what would become of you? . . . *Responde mihi? . . .*"



Someone asked her, while I was present, to give some advice about spiritual direction:

"I think it is well to be on our guard and to avoid all self-seeking, otherwise our heart will be wounded, and then we will say with truth: *The keepers have taken away my cloak, they have*

wounded me. . . . It was only after I had gone a little beyond them that I found my Well-Beloved.¹⁵ If the soul humbly asks the keepers where her Well-Beloved is, they will tell her; but if she wants to be admired, she will fall into trouble and lose her simplicity of heart.”



In reference to a novice who tried to hide her feelings from her, Thérèse observed:

“Virtue shines naturally; I notice at once when it is no longer there.”



“Leaning forward a little, and looking out of the window, I just saw the setting sun casting his last rays upon nature. I noticed how the tree-tops appeared all golden in his light. Then I said: ‘So also my soul appears bright and golden, because it is exposed to the rays of Love.’ But if the Divine Sun ceased to cast His rays upon me, I should very soon become shadowed and over-cast.”



¹⁵ Cf. Cant. 5:7; 3:4.

JULY 27, 1897

At the end of a hard day's washing she said to me:

"Toward one o'clock I thought to myself: 'The sisters are very tired in the laundry.' And I asked God to solace you all, so that the work might be done in peace and love. I thought as I lay here sick that I was experiencing the joy of suffering along with you."



She reminded me of certain words of St. John of the Cross:

"'Break the web of this sweet encounter.'¹⁶ I have always applied those words to the death of love which I desire. Love will not wear out the web of my life, it will break it suddenly.

"With what desire and with what consolation I have repeated to myself from the commencement of my religious life these other words of St. John of the Cross: 'It is of the highest importance that the soul exercise itself much in love, so that its course may be quickly finished, and being but little delayed here below, it may quickly come to see God face to face!'"¹⁷



¹⁶ *The Living Flame of Love*, strophe I.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*

“As for my mission, like that of Joan of Arc, the will of God will be accomplished, notwithstanding the hostility of men.”



“I rejoice at death only because it is the expression of God’s will for me.”



“I have never asked God that I might die young; so I am sure then that it will be accomplished only at the moment which *He* wills.”



After a crisis of suffocation, I showed my compassion and distress.

“Oh, do not be distressed; if I suffocate, God will give me strength to bear it. I love Him! He will never abandon me!”



JULY 28, 1897

Sister Marie of the Sacred Heart said to her: “How happy to die after having spent one’s life in love.”

“Yes, but to enjoy that happiness it is necessary also to have practiced fraternal love.”



JULY 29, 1897

A sister related to her these words, which she had heard during recreation: "I do not see why anyone speaks of Sister Thérèse of the Child Jesus as a saint. She has practiced virtue, it is true, but not a virtue acquired through suffering and humiliation."

Thérèse said to me on that subject:

"And I who have suffered so much from my tenderest infancy! Ah, what good it does me to know the opinion of creatures at the hour of death."



Someone thought to give her pleasure by bringing to her a distracting object, but it had the opposite effect. She feared she had hurt the sister's feelings, and asked her pardon with tears:

"Oh, I *do* ask your pardon; I have acted according to nature; pray for me. . . ."

And a little later:

"How happy I am to see myself imperfect and to have such need of the mercy of God at the moment of death."



We expressed our fears that she would die during the night, and she replied:

“I shall not die during the night. Be assured of this: I do not wish to die during the night, and I have asked that favor of the Blessed Virgin.”



During the evening she said:

“I am going to die at last! For three days I have suffered very much; this evening it is like being in purgatory.”



“Very often, when I have enough strength, I repeat my Offering to the All-merciful Love.”



In speaking to me of certain past trials, she said:

“That which has been our humiliation for a moment will be our glory, even in this life.”



“I have never had much capacity for enjoyment; I have always noticed that; but I have a great capacity for suffering.”



JULY 30, 1897

“My body has always inconvenienced me; I have never been at home in it . . . and even when quite a little child it caused me confusion.”



“I would not pick up a straw to avoid going to purgatory. All that I have done, I have done to give God pleasure and to save souls.”



The flies tormented her very much, but she would not kill them.

“They are my only enemies, and as God has commanded us to forgive our enemies, I am very glad to find an occasion to do so. That is why I always spare them. . . .”



“It is very hard to suffer so much, isn't it?” she was asked.

“No, I am still able to tell God that I love Him; that is sufficient,” she replied.



Pointing to a glass which contained a very unpleasant remedy, although its appearance was very attractive, she said:

“Do you see that little glass? One would think it contained a most delicious drink; but in reality I have never tasted anything quite so bitter! Ah, well! That is the image of my life, which has always appeared to be clothed in the most cheerful colors. To others it has appeared that I drank a most exquisite liqueur, while, on the contrary, it has been a draught of bitterness. I say of bitterness, yet notwithstanding, my life has not been bitter, because I have made the whole of that bitterness become my joy and sweetness.”



“Would you prepare me to receive Extreme Unction? . . . Pray God that I receive it as well as it is possible to do so.

“Our Father Superior¹⁸ said to me: ‘You are going to be like a little child who has just been baptized.’ Then he spoke to me only of Love. Oh, how touched I was!”



In the afternoon she received Extreme Unction and Holy Communion by way of Viaticum. After the cere-

¹⁸Canon Maupas, parish priest of Saint Jacques, Lisieux.

mony, with much reverence, she showed us her hands. Before she had time to finish her act of thanksgiving, several sisters came in to speak with her. Later on she said to me:

“How much I was disturbed during my act of thanksgiving! But I remembered that our Lord when He had sought to retire into solitude was followed by the multitude, and He did not send them away. So I was happy to imitate Him by receiving my sisters graciously.”



They had sent down her palliase in advance, as they thought her death was imminent. She saw it in the Infirmary in a room adjoining hers. When someone opened the door, she exclaimed gaily:

“Ah! there is our palliase! It is quite ready to receive *my corpse!*”¹⁹



“Mother, after my death, if you would make known my gratitude to Dr. de Cornière for taking care of me, you will paint him a picture with

¹⁹ At Carmel the bodies of the deceased sisters are laid out on their palliasses in the Infirmary. Later they are carried to the choir, and placed in coffins.

these words on it: 'As long as you did it to one of these my least brethren, you did it to me.'"²⁰



JULY 31, 1897

"I have found joy and happiness on earth, but solely in suffering, because I have suffered much here below. You must make this known to souls. . . .

"Ever since my First Communion, when I asked Jesus to change into bitterness all the consolations of earth, I have had a ceaseless desire to suffer. I did not, however, at first think of making it my joy. That was a grace accorded me later on. Until then it was like a spark hidden in ashes, and like the flowers of a tree, which should give place to fruit in due season. But seeing the flowers always falling—that is to say, letting my tears fall when I was suffering—I thought to myself with astonishment and sadness: 'Then there will be nothing but desires!'"



I said to her: "If you should live much longer, no one will believe you have really been sick!"

She answered joyously:

²⁰ Matt. 25:40.

“What does it matter! The whole world may well despise me, that is what I have always desired. I shall have it, then, at the end of my life.”



The three of us (her sisters) were near her, and we were beginning to grow a little drowsy from fatigue and sorrow. She watched us, and then, pointing her finger at each one of us, she said with an arch smile:

“Peter, James, and John! . . .”

We understood the allusion to the Apostles at Gethsemane, and at the same time her intention to distract us by that playful sally.



August



AUGUST 1, 1897

She reminded me of the great grace she had been granted (in July, 1887) while looking at a picture of Our Lord on the Cross, a grace of which she speaks in her *Autobiography*. She repeated to me what she had said then:

“Oh! I would not allow that Precious Blood to be lost. I shall spend my life in gathering it up for souls.”



Referring to the manuscript of her *Autobiography*, she said:

“Mother, you must not discuss the manuscript with anyone until it has been published—with Our Mother’s consent. If you do act otherwise, the devil will employ more than one snare to prevent and injure the work of God—a work that is very important!”

Some time afterward, having asked her to read again a passage in her manuscript which appeared to me incomplete, I found her with her eyes filled with tears. When I asked her the cause, she replied with angelic simplicity:

“What I have read over again in my manuscript so truly reveals my soul! . . . Mother, these pages

will do much good. They will make the sweetness of the good God better known.”

Then she added, in a tone as if inspired:

“Ah! I know it well, all the world will love me. . . .”



Someone told her of a very ascetic priest who denied himself the least alleviation when undergoing a most intolerable suffering.

She replied:

“. . . As our Lord has truly said: In my Father’s house there are many mansions.*

“As for me, I should not be able to restrain myself in that way . . . I prefer rather that type of mortification which allows more liberty of spirit.”



“One will not be able to say of me, as of our Mother St. Teresa, ‘She dies because she cannot die.’

“For my nature, heaven, yes! But grace in my soul has acquired such an empire over my nature that now I can only say to God:

* John 14:2.

“I fain would live an exile here
 If such be Thy sweet will for me—
 Or fain would flee from exile drear
 And join in heaven’s ecstasy.
 Since Love’s most sweet divinest breath
 Is all I need my life to bless,
 What matters life, what matters death?
Love is my peace, my happiness.”



“All passes in this world, even *little Thérèse* . . .
 but she will come back! . . .”



“I experience a lively joy, not only in being
 judged to be imperfect, but, above all, in feeling
 that I am so. That joy is sweeter to me than all
 compliments, which really only weary me.”



AUGUST 3, 1897

“How have you attained this unalterable peace which is
 now your portion?”

“. . . I have forgotten myself, and I have en-
 deavored never to seek self in anything.”



I spoke to her of mortification under the form of instruments of penance.

“... It is necessary to have great moderation in those practices, otherwise there will be very easily mingled with them more of nature than of grace. . . .”



And on another occasion she spoke to me on the same subject:

“In the Life of Blessed Henry Suso there is a very striking passage with regard to corporal penances. He had undertaken the most frightful penances, which had well-nigh ruined his health, when an angel appeared to him and told him to stop, adding: ‘You are not to fight any longer as a simple soldier; from this moment I shall arm you as a knight.’ And he made the saint understand the superiority of the spiritual conflict over the mortifications of the flesh.

“Very well, Little Mother. God has not willed me to fight as a simple soldier. He armed me at once as a knight, and I have engaged in the war against myself in the spiritual domain by abnegation and little hidden sacrifices. I have found peace and humility in that hidden conflict wherein Nature finds nothing for herself.”

“My little sisters, pray for those poor sick ones who are near death! If you only knew what they experience! How easy for them to lose patience over some trifle! . . . One ought to be very loving and indulgent toward them. . . .”



To us, her three sisters, she said:

“Attend well to regularity. After you have been to the parlor, do not stop to exchange your reflections, because then you would become like members of a family where one is deprived of nothing.”



I told her that she must have been through many struggles to attain to such a degree of perfection.

She replied, with an indefinable accent:

“Oh, it is not that! . . .”

And a little later:

“Holiness does not consist in this or that practice; it consists in a *disposition of the heart*, which makes us always humble and little in the arms of God, well aware of our feebleness, but boldly confident in the Father’s goodness.”



“Oh, how my shoulder is torturing me! If you only knew!”

Someone went to ease her position.

“ . . . No, I must not get away from my little cross.”



AUGUST 4, 1897

On a reflection that was made to her, she said:

“No, I do not think I am a great saint! . . . But I think God has been pleased to bestow such favors upon me as will benefit myself and others.”



Someone brought her a small stalk of corn, and, taking one of the best ears, she said:

“Mother, this ear of corn is the image of my soul, which God has loaded with graces for myself and for the good of others. . . . Ah! may I always incline beneath the abundance of His heavenly gifts. . . .”

Then, fearing that she had manifested a presumptuous thought, she added:

“Oh! that I might be humiliated and maltreated to see if I have true humility of heart! Still, when

I was humiliated in the past, I was very happy. . . . Yes, it does seem to me that I am humble. God shows me the truth, and I see so clearly that everything comes from Him! . . .”



She was suffering very much.

“Ah! I realize how much I should be discouraged if I had not faith, or rather if I did not love God!”



“I fell asleep for a few moments during prayer. I dreamed that there was a lack of soldiers for a war. You said: ‘We must send Sister Thérèse of the Child Jesus.’ I answered: ‘I would have much preferred it to have been for a holy war.’ But I set out all the same.

“Oh, Mother,” she added with animation, “what happiness it would have been to fight, for example, at the time of the Crusades, or later to fight against the heretics! Forward! I should have had no fear of the fire!

“And is it possible, then, that I shall die in my bed!”



"How do you order your spiritual life now?" she was asked.

". . . My spiritual life in sickness! it is to suffer, and that is all! . . . I cannot constrain myself to say: 'My God, this is for the Church; my God, this is for France,' and so on. . . . God knows very well what to do with my merits. I have given everything to Him just to give Him pleasure. And besides, it would weary my mind to be saying to Him each instant: 'Give this to Peter, give that to Paul.' Whenever one of the Sisters asks this of me I do it at once, and then I think no more about it. When I pray for my brother missionaries, I do not offer my sufferings, but say very simply: 'My God, give them everything that I desire for myself'. . . ."



AUGUST 5, 1897

Someone had pitied the Carmelites for having to wear such heavy habits during the summer heat. She said:

"Ah! God will repay us in heaven for having worn these heavy habits on earth for love of Him."



A sister said to her that the angels would come at the moment of her death to accompany Our Lord, and

Thérèse would see them all resplendent with light and beauty.

“All such fancies cannot help me; I can nourish myself only upon the truth. That is the reason why I have never wished to have any visions. On earth we can never behold heaven and the angels such as they really are. I much prefer to wait for that until after my death.”



“I repeat, like Job: In the morning I hope I may not see the evening, and in the evening I hope I shall not see the morning.”¹



For the feast of the following day, August 6, the Transfiguration, we placed near her bed a picture of the Holy Face, which she liked very much.² She said to me:

“Our Lord has done well to lower His eyes in giving us His portrait! For seeing that the eyes are the mirror of the soul, if we had been given a glimpse of His soul, we should have died of joy.

“Oh! what good that Holy Face has done in my life! When I was composing my canticle, *To live*

¹ Cf. Job 7:4.

² The saint honored especially the Holy Face of Jesus on this feast.

of love, it helped me to put it together with great facility. I wrote from memory, during the three quarters of an hour's silence in the evening, the fifteen couplets I had composed during the day. That day, going to the Refectory after the *examen*, I had just composed the strophe:

“To live of love, it is to dry Thy Tears.

To seek for pardon for each sinful soul.

and I repeated these lines to Him when passing by the picture, and with so much love.³ . . . Looking at the Holy Face, I wept for love.”



“My devotion to the Holy Face, or rather all my spirituality, has been based on these words of Isaias: ‘There is no beauty in him, nor comeliness: and we have seen him, and there was no sightliness [in him]. . . . Despised and the most abject of men, a man of sorrows, and acquainted with infirmity: and his look was as it were hidden and despised, whereupon we esteemed him not.’⁴ I, too, desire to be without glory or beauty, to tread the winepress alone,⁵ unknown to any creature.”

³ On passing before the picture of the Holy Face, going from the Choir to the Refectory.

⁴ Isa. 53:2-3.

⁵ Cf. Isa. 63:3.

AUGUST 6, 1897

She had hoped to die at the dawn of this day, and she never ceased to gaze upon the Holy Face during the night. In the morning she said to me:

“I have awaited Jesus all the night. I have resisted many temptations. Ah, how many acts of faith I have made! . . . I, too, can say: ‘I have looked on my right hand and considered, and there was no one that would know me . . . that would know the moment of my death.’”⁶

She then gazed at the statue of the Blessed Virgin and sang softly:

“When shall it come, my tender Mother,
That joyful day, when shall it come?
When earth is no more and exile ended
I fly to the joys of my heavenly home.”



Concerning the Office of the Dead, from which they had finally dispensed her on account of her sickness, she said to me:

“I have nothing now upon which to rest; upon not one of my works do I place my confidence. I cannot even say to myself: ‘I have duly said all my Offices of the Dead. . . .’ But the consciousness

⁶ Ps. 141:5.

of my poverty has been a true light to me. I realized that I have never in my whole life discharged one of my debts toward God, and that this was a veritable fortune for me and also a strength, if I would have it. Then I made this prayer: 'O my God, I beseech You to discharge Yourself the debt I have contracted toward the souls in purgatory. But do it as befits a God, that so it may be infinitely better than if I myself had fulfilled my obligations.' And I recalled with great sweetness those words of the poetical canticle of St. John of the Cross: 'Pay every debt.'⁷ I have always applied this line to love. I feel it is a grace which cannot be explained. . . . One experiences so great a peace in being absolutely poor and trusting in no one save God alone."



We were speaking together of the little value people usually set on hidden virtue. She added:

"That struck me most of all, in reading the life of St. John of the Cross. Did not someone say of him: 'Brother John of the Cross! Why, he is a religious who is rather less than ordinary!' . . ."



⁷ *The Living Flame of Love*, strophe II.

The course of her sickness took a disconcerting turn. "Of what, then, will you die?" I asked.

"But I shall die of death! Did not God tell Adam of what he should die? He said to him: 'Thou shalt die the death.'⁸ It is all that simple."



In reference to the Divine Office:

"How proud I felt when I was hebdomadarian⁹ at the Office and recited all the prayers in a loud voice in the middle of the choir. I used to recall how the priest said the same prayers at Mass, and that I had, like him, the right to speak aloud before the Blessed Sacrament, to give the blessings and absolutions, and to read the Gospel when I was the first chantress.

"I can say that the Office has been at one and the same time my happiness and my martyrdom, because I had such a great desire to recite it without a fault! I readily excuse the sisters who forget to announce a versicle or make other mistakes. Sometimes when the moment came for me to say something which I had carefully noted and fore-

⁸ Gen. 2:17.

⁹ The Sister who is appointed each week to officiate at the Divine Office.

seen, I let it pass through some involuntary distraction without opening my lips.

"I do not believe, however, that anyone could possibly desire more than I to recite the Divine Office perfectly and to assist in the choir."



On an occasion when the Mother Prioress had asked her for an explanation about some forgetfulness on the part of the Infirmarian (an aged religious) which might have had serious consequences for an invalid like her, Thérèse said to me:

"I had to tell Our Mother the whole truth, but, while speaking, there came to mind the thought of an expression more charitable than the one I was going to employ, although the latter was not a bad one; I followed my inspiration and God has rewarded me with a great interior peace."



She was asked to explain what she meant by the words: *to remain as a little child before God*. She answered:

"It is to recognize our nothingness, to look for everything from God as a little child looks for everything from his father; it is to be disquieted about nothing, and not to be set on gaining our fortune. Even among the poor, they give the child all he needs until he grows up; then his father

will no longer support him, and says to him: 'Go out to work now, for you are able to look after yourself.' It is to avoid hearing this that I have desired not to grow up, because I realized I should never be able to earn my own living, the eternal life of heaven! I have, then, always remained little, and have had no other occupation than that of gathering flowers, the flowers of love and sacrifice. These I have offered to the good God simply for His own pleasure.

"*To be little*, moreover, is not to attribute to ourselves the virtues we practice, nor to believe ourselves capable of practicing virtue at all. It is, rather, to recognize the fact that God puts treasures of virtue into the hands of His little children to make use of them in time of need, but they remain always the treasures of the good God. Finally, *to be little* means that we must never be discouraged over our faults, for children often fall but they are too small to harm themselves very much."



AUGUST 7, 1897

"Oh! how little is the good God loved upon earth, even by those who are consecrated to Him! . . . No, God is not much loved! . . ."



“Mother, if I were unfaithful, if I were to commit even the slightest infidelity, I feel that I would pay for it by overwhelming troubles, and I should no longer be able to welcome death. So, unceasingly I say to God: ‘O God, I beseech You to keep me from being unfaithful.’”

“What type of infidelity are you referring to?” I asked.

“. . . Of a proud thought voluntarily entertained, as, for example: ‘I have acquired such a virtue, and I know I possess the power to practice it.’ Then I should be depending on my own strength, and when that happens, there is risk of falling into the abyss. Or if I were to say: ‘My God, I love You so much (and You know it) that I would not dwell for even one moment on a temptation against faith,’ these temptations would then become so violent that I should most certainly go under.

“But, on the other hand, if I am humble, I have the privilege of falling into little follies, without offending God, until the day of my death.

“Consider the example of little children: they are always breaking things, tearing their clothes, or falling down, and all the while they are loving their parents very much. And so, when I fall, like a little child, it makes me lay the finger on my nothingness and my weakness, and I think to myself:

‘What would happen to me, to what lengths would I go, were I to depend on my own strength?’

“I can well understand how St. Peter fell. Poor St. Peter! He relied on self instead of leaning on the power of God. I am sure if he had said humbly to Jesus: ‘I beseech You to give me the courage to follow You even unto death,’ that courage would have been granted him instantly. Furthermore, I am certain, too, Our Lord taught no more to His Apostles by His instructions and by His visible presence than He teaches to us by the inspirations of His grace. He could have said to Peter: ‘Ask Me for the strength to accomplish what you desire to do.’ But no, since He destined Peter to govern the whole Church, in which there are many sinners, He willed that he should experience in himself just what man is without the grace of God.

“It was for this reason that Jesus said to him before his fall: ‘And thou, being once converted, confirm thy brethren.’¹⁰ In other words, ‘Tell them the story of your fall; show them—by describing your own experience—the disastrous effects of resting on human props.’”



AUGUST 8, 1897

I told her that later on her virtues would be recognized at their true value. She answered:

¹⁰ Luke 22:32.

"It is to God alone all value must be attributed, because there is nothing of value in my little nothingness."



"If Our Lord and the Blessed Virgin had not themselves gone to feasts, I should never have understood the custom of inviting our friends to a repast. It seems to me our physical nourishment should be taken in private, or at least within the family circle only. Invite our friends—yes, but only to converse about our travels, our reminiscences, or for intellectual pleasures.

"I often greatly pitied those whose duty it was to serve at grand dinners. If by chance they made some mistake, I noticed the mistress of the house look at them so severely, and those poor creatures would blush for shame. It made me ponder to myself: 'Oh, how well this difference existing here on earth between masters and servants proves there is a heaven where each one shall be placed according to his interior worth, where all will have prominent places at their Father's banquet. And then, how royally we shall be served, for Jesus Himself has said that *He will come and serve us.*'¹¹ That will be the moment when the poor and the

¹¹ Luke 12:37.

little ones will be abundantly recompensed for all their humiliations on earth."



She was contemplating the heavens, and Sister Marie of the Sacred Heart (her sister) made this remark to her: "How *lovingly* you are looking up to heaven!"

A little later Thérèse said to me:

"When Marie said that, I thought to myself: 'Ah! she believes that when I look up to the skies I am thinking of the true heaven, but I am, in truth, only admiring the material heaven: the true heaven is more than ever closed to me.' I was rather troubled about this when suddenly I was struck by this thought which brought great sweetness of soul with it: 'Yes, indeed, it was through love I was looking up to the heavens, for my soul is entirely enveloped with love. Therefore, all my actions, even the most indifferent ones, are marked with that divine seal.' It was as if an interior voice suggested this thought to me, and immediately I was consoled."



"I was thinking today of my past life, and especially of that courageous act on that Christmas long ago. . . . The praises addressed to Judith

came to mind: 'Thou hast done manfully, and thy heart has been strengthened.'¹²

"How many souls plead: 'I have not enough fortitude to accomplish such an act?' But let them put forth some effort! The good God never refuses the first grace which *imparts courage* to act. After that, the heart is strengthened and the soul goes on from victory to victory."



AUGUST 9, 1897

I said to her: "Our little warrior is beaten!"

She answered:

"I am not a warrior who fights with earthly weapons, but with *the sword of the Spirit which is the word of God*.¹³ So this sickness has not beaten me, and it was only last evening that I used my

¹² Judith 15:11. This reference to the "courageous act on that Christmas long ago" refers to an incident which, according to the Saint, marked her "conversion." It took place on Christmas morning, in the year 1886, in the Martin home. Cf. *Autobiography*, p. 86. Here it is interesting to note that in another corner of France a famous conversion was taking place on that same day, when Paul Claudel received the gift of faith. It is Claudel himself who has synchronized his own conversion with that of little Thérèse Martin. (Translator's note.)

¹³ Eph. 6:17 (quoted in the Rule of Carmel).

sword with a novice. . . . Have I not said: 'I shall die sword in hand?'"



Someone said to her: "You are a saint!"

"No, I am not a saint! I have never performed the works of the saints. I am just a little soul whom the good God has overwhelmed with His graces. You will see in heaven that what I say is the truth."



AUGUST 10, 1897

Someone quoted and applied to her those words of St. John of the Cross: "Souls who have reached perfect love may without danger recognize their supernatural beauty."

She replied:

"What beauty? I do not see my beauty at all. I see only the graces I have received from God."



Looking at a photograph of St. Joan of Arc in prison, she said:

"The saints encourage me also in my prison. They say to me: 'As long as you are in chains, you cannot fulfil your mission; but later on, after your death, then shall come the time of your conquest.'"



“I am reminded of the words of St. Ignatius of Antioch: *‘I, too, must be ground by suffering so as to become the fine wheat of God.’*”



I said to her: “I prayed that you might not suffer much, and you are suffering very much!”

She replied:

“I have asked God not to hear the prayers that would place an obstacle to the accomplishment of His designs upon me. . . .”



I was conversing with her about heaven, and of our Saviour and the Blessed Virgin, who are there in body and in soul.

She heaved a deep sigh and whispered:

“Ah. . . .”

“That exclamation reveals how much you are suffering interiorly!” I said.

“Yes! Should one who loves God and the Blessed Virgin so much have such thoughts! . . . But I do not dwell on them.”

(She was alluding to her great interior trial of faith.)



"I often pray to the saints without being heard. . . . But the more deaf they seem to be to my voice, the more I love them."

"Why?"

"Because I have desired more *not* to see God and the saints, and to rest in this dark night of faith than others have desired to see all and to understand all."



AUGUST 11, 1897

"I would never ask God for greater sufferings, for then they would be my own sufferings, and I should have to bear them all alone, and I have never been able to do anything of myself."



AUGUST 12, 1897

"Ever since that reflection I made to you the other day about the ear of corn, I have had very lowly thoughts about myself. But how great was this new grace which I received this morning at the moment when the priest began the *Confiteor*, before giving me Holy Communion!

"I beheld our Lord all ready to give Himself to me, and that confession appeared to me a very

necessary humiliation: I confess to God, to Blessed Mary ever virgin . . . and to all the saints . . . that I have sinned exceedingly. 'Oh, yes,' I said to myself, 'one does well at this moment to ask pardon for me from God and from all the saints.' I felt myself to be, like the publican, a great sinner, and God appeared to me as being so merciful! I found that address to the whole heavenly court, to obtain through their intercession the forgiveness of my sins, to be so touching. . . . Ah, I had much difficulty in holding back my tears! And when the Sacred Host rested upon my lips I was strangely moved. . . . It was extraordinary to have had that experience at the *Confiteor*! I believe that it is the cause of my present disposition of soul, for I see I am so miserable! My confidence, however, is not in the least diminished because of it; quite the contrary. But the word *miserable* does not express what I would say, since I am enriched with all the divine treasures. However, it is just that which makes me humble myself the more. . . . When I think of all the graces God has bestowed upon me, I have all I can do not to let my tears of gratitude flow unceasingly. It seems to me that the tears I shed this morning were tears of perfect contrition. Ah! how impossible it is for us of ourselves to produce such sentiments in our hearts! It is the Holy

Spirit who gives them, 'who breatheth where he will.'"¹⁴



AUGUST 13, 1897

I spoke to her of the interior lights which one sometimes receives about heaven. She said to me:

"As for me, I have only light to see my utter nothingness, but that does me more good than lights concerning faith."



AUGUST 14, 1897

A most painful day for her in body and soul. I said to her in the evening: "You have had much suffering today!"

"Yes, but I love it! I love whatsoever God gives me."



AUGUST 15, 1897

I reminded her of the words of St. John of the Cross concerning souls consummated in Divine Love: "They die in the most admirable transports and in the delightful assaults of that love which surrounds them." . . . She sighed and said:

"You must explain that those transports and joys are only in the depths of my soul. . . . It would not encourage souls if they believed that I had not suffered much."

¹⁴ John 3:8.

She was suffering intensely from oppression.

“I do not know what will become of me!” she sighed.

“Does that disquiet you?” I asked.

“Oh! no,” she replied.



“I asked the Blessed Virgin last evening that I might not cough so that Sister Geneviève might be able to sleep during the night;¹⁵ but I added: ‘If you do not do this for me, I shall love you all the more.’”



“God gives me courage in proportion to my sufferings. I think at present I could not bear any more. But I am not afraid; for, if the sufferings increase, He will at the same time increase my courage.”



AUGUST 16, 1897

She was unable to speak, her oppression and weakness were so great.

“I . . . can speak with you . . . no . . . longer!

¹⁵ Sister Geneviève of the Holy Face (sister of Thérèse), then Second Infirmarian, slept in a cell close to the Infirmary.

Oh! if one only knew! . . . If I did not love the good God!"



AUGUST 17, 1897

"I realize that God wills me to suffer; the remedies which ought to do me good, and which *do* relieve others, only make me worse."



"I will pray for you that the Blessed Virgin may relieve your physical oppression."

"No, let them do what they will up there!"



AUGUST 18, 1897

"I suffer much, but do I suffer well? That is the important thing!"



During recreation she said to me:

"Mother, please read me the letter you have received for me. I denied myself the satisfaction of asking you about it this afternoon, so as to prepare for my Communion tomorrow."

Seeing that I took a pencil to write that down, she said:

"Perhaps the merit of it will be lost because I

have told you of it and you are now writing it down."

"You want to acquire merits then?"

". . . Yes, but not for myself—for souls, for all the needs of the Church—in short, to scatter roses on the whole world, upon the just and upon the sinners."



I told her that she had been very patient. She replied:

"I have never had patience for a single minute! It is not mine! You always make that mistake."



"How strange it would seem to you if you recovered your health!"

"If it were the will of God I should be very happy, on the contrary, to offer Him that sacrifice. But I assure you that it would not be a small matter, after going so far, to return."



AUGUST 19, 1897

In consequence of her extreme weakness she nearly fainted while listening, before Holy Communion,¹⁶ to the

¹⁶ That was the last Communion of her life; the handwritten notes of Rev. Mother Agnes of Jesus prove that. It was through an error that, in the *Autobiography*, August 16 is given as the date of the last Communion of the Saint.

chanting of the *Miserere*, even though chanted in subdued tones.

“Perhaps my mind shall become unbalanced. . . . Oh! if one only knew what this trial is like! During the night, being unable to do more, I asked the Blessed Virgin to take my head in her hands, so that I might be able to support it.”



Someone gave her her crucifix. She kissed it with tenderness. The Christ had the head inclined. She said while gazing on it:

“He is dead. I like it better when He is represented as dead, because then I realize He suffers no more.”



She asked for a remedy and for treatments which cost her much distress.

“I ask for them,” she said, “through fidelity to duty.”



She still watched over the novices, and said to one of them:

“One must not sit sideways on the chairs. This is a written law for us.”



"I suffer only from moment to moment. . . . It is because we think either of the past or of the future that we become discouraged and despair."



AUGUST 20, 1897

Someone explained how much a poor sister suffering from neurasthenia wearied the Infirmarian.

She replied with animation:

"How gladly would I have been Infirmarian to take care of that sister! Grace would have spoken louder than nature. Yes, I have a taste for that work. And with how much love I would have done it! Oh! how I should have made that sister happy, especially in calling to mind those words of Jesus: 'I was . . . sick, and you visited me.'" ¹⁷



She was no longer able to drink milk, which caused her great repugnance. I said to her: "Would you drink this glass for me to save my life?"

"Oh! yes . . . and yet I would not take it for the love of God!"

And then she drank it off at a single draught.



¹⁷ Matt. 25:36.

“When I suffer very much, I am glad that it is I and not one of you who suffers.”



Referring to the letter of a priest who said that the Blessed Virgin never experienced any physical suffering, she said:

“Mother, in looking at the Blessed Virgin last night I realized that this is not true. I understood that the Blessed Virgin suffered not only in soul but also in body. She suffered much on her journeys, from cold, heat, and fatigue . . . and she fasted much. . . . Yes, she knows well what it is to suffer.

“How delightful it will be to know in heaven all that passed in the intimacy of the Holy Family! How the little Jesus as He grew up perhaps told His Mother that He wanted to fast . . . and the Blessed Virgin replied: ‘No, my little Jesus, You are too young yet; You have not the strength for it.’ Or very likely she did not dare to oppose Him?

“And good St. Joseph! How I love him! He could not fast on account of his work. . . . I see him working with the plane; he wipes his forehead from time to time. Oh, how I pity him! How simple their life appears to me!

“The women of the countryside came to speak

familiarly with the Blessed Virgin. Sometimes they asked her to let her little Jesus go and play with their children. And the little Jesus looked up to the Blessed Virgin to see if He ought to go. . . .

“That which does me so much good in reflecting upon the Holy Family is to picture it as a life wholly ordinary—not at all like the sort of stories that are told which are mere suppositions, as, for example, that the Child Jesus after having made birds out of clay, breathed upon them and made them live. No, the little Jesus would not have performed useless miracles . . . else, why were they not transported to Egypt by a miracle, a thing far more natural, and which would be so easy with God? In the twinkling of an eye He could have put them there. . . . But no, everything in their life was just as it is in ours.

“And how many pains and disappointments? How many times people reproached good St. Joseph, how many times they refused to pay him for his work? Oh, how astonished we should be if we knew all they suffered!”



“I experienced a certain pleasure in thinking that someone was praying for me: then I told God that I wished Him to apply that to sinners.”

"You do not, then, wish that to be for your own solace?"

"No!"



AUGUST 21, 1897

I was on my knees praying for her and had my gaze fixed upon her.

"You are sad, Mother; what for?"

"Because you suffer so much!" I sighed.

"Yes, but what peace as well! What peace!"



I said to her: "They judged you imperfect on that particular occasion when you were not understood." With satisfaction she replied:

"Oh! good; so much the better!"



AUGUST 22, 1897

She was suffering extremely, and in every way, and there was reason to fear serious complications.

"Ah, well! That is all the better, to have much to suffer on every side, and to have a variety of maladies at the same time. It is like being on a journey during which we valiantly put up with all sorts of inconveniences, knowing well it will

soon be over, and that once the end is attained, we will rejoice all the more."



"Oh, Mother, what would become of me if God did not give me His strength? . . . My hands alone are free. One would never believe it possible to suffer like this! No, it must be experienced to be understood. . . ."



From time to time she moaned gently. Then she said to us:

". . . I must complain no more; it does no good. My little sisters, pray for me. . . ."

And as we were going to kneel down, she said sweetly:

". . . No, not on your knees, but sitting up! . . ."



AUGUST 23, 1897

"I have never before had such a bad night. Oh, how good the good God must be, since He enables me to bear all I suffer! Never would I have believed it possible to suffer so much. And even yet I do not believe I am at the end of my suffering; but He will never abandon me!"

"You have written:

"All that He has given me, Jesus may take back again.
You have been heard to the letter."

". . . Yes, and I do not repent of it!"



"God does not give me the presentiment that death is near, but rather of much greater sufferings. . . . But I do not distress myself, and I only think of the present moment."



To her Infirmarian:

"Pray much to the Blessed Virgin for me, for if you were sick I should pray much for you. When it is for oneself, one is not very bold. . . ."



She had offered her sufferings for a young seminarian who had temptations against his vocation. He had heard of it, and had written a most humble and touching letter, concerning which she said to me:

"Oh, how much consolation that letter has brought me! Have you noticed what sentiments of humility it manifests? I see my little sufferings have borne some fruit. And what a joy it is for me to know, through that letter, in how short a time

we are able to have so much love and gratitude for a person hitherto unknown! What will it be like, then, up in heaven, when souls shall know those who have been the means of their salvation?"



She spoke to me again about the Blessed Virgin, and told me not one of the sermons she had heard about her had made the least impression.

"... How very glad I should have been to be a priest, so as to preach about the Blessed Virgin! It seems to me I would need only one opportunity to explain fully my thought on the subject.

"First I should have shown how little is known of the life of the Blessed Virgin. It is not well to say things about her that are unlikely, or that we do not know for certain, as, for example, that it was with feelings of extraordinary fervor and on fire with love that at the age of three she went to the Temple to offer herself to God. Perhaps she went quite simply in obedience to her parents!

"Again, regarding the prophetic words of the old man, Simeon, why insist that the Blessed Virgin from that moment had constantly before her eyes the Passion of Jesus?—"Thy own soul a sword shall pierce."¹⁸ You see very well, Little Mother,

¹⁸ Luke 2:35.

that it was a prediction of what was to come later on. . . ."



"For a sermon on the Blessed Virgin to bear fruit it must manifest her real life, such as the Gospel has set it before us, and not her apocryphal life. We can well understand that her real life at Nazareth and the subsequent years must have been quite ordinary. . . . 'He was subject to them.'¹⁹ How simple that is!

"Instead of showing the Blessed Virgin as all but inaccessible, we should hold her up as possible of imitation while practicing the hidden virtues, and living by faith just like us. And our proofs are from the Gospel, where we read, 'They understood not the word that he spoke unto them;'²⁰ and again, 'And his father and mother were wondering at those things which were spoken concerning him.'²¹ That admiration implies a certain astonishment. Do you not find it so, Mother?

"How I love to sing to her:

"By common lot and humble path, our Mother dear and holy—

¹⁹ Luke 2:51.

²⁰ Luke 2:50.

²¹ Luke 2:33.

Thou wast content to *walk* to heaven, and thus our guide to be!”



A little later she returned to the same thought.

“We all know the Blessed Virgin is Queen of heaven and earth, but she is more mother than queen, and I do not believe (as I have so often heard it said) that because of her prerogatives she will eclipse the glory of all the saints, just as the rising sun blots out the light of the stars. My God, how strange that would be! A mother who would make the glory of her children disappear! I think quite the contrary, and I believe she will rather greatly increase the glory of the elect.

“It is well to speak of her prerogatives, but we must not stop there. We must make everybody love her. If while listening to a sermon on the Blessed Virgin we are constrained to exclaim from the beginning to the end, ‘Ah! . . . Ah!’ we are wearied, and that does not lead us to love and imitation. Who knows if some soul might not go so far as to feel a certain estrangement from a creature who is so very far superior to us. . . .

“The unique privilege of the Blessed Virgin is to have been exempt from original sin and to be the Mother of God. And on this last point Jesus

has said to us: 'Whosoever shall do the will of my Father, that is in heaven, he is my brother, and sister, and mother.'²²

"On the other hand, we are happier than she is, for . . . she has not the Blessed Virgin to love. . . . Oh, how much more is that a sweetness for us and how much less is it one for her. . . . Oh, how I love the Blessed Virgin! . . ."



". . . When we pray to the Blessed Virgin and she does not hear us, we ought to let her do what she pleases without insisting, and not go on tormenting ourselves any further."



AUGUST 24, 1897

I asked her if she was not disheartened.

"No; however, it is going from bad to worse. With each new breath I am suffering violently."

She rejoined:

"No, it is not all for the worse, it is all for the better!"



²² Matt. 12:50.

AUGUST 25, 1897

I told her of my desire to know the date of her death. She replied:

“Ah, for myself, I do not wish to know it. That troubles me little! In what peace I dwell!”



One of the sisters had the habit of entering the Infirmary every evening, and placing herself at the foot of the bed, she continued to smile at Thérèse for a considerable time. Our little Saint smiled back in return. I surmised, however, that this indiscreet visit was fatiguing our invalid very much. When I asked her about this, she answered:

“Yes, it is very painful to be the object of smiles when we are suffering, but I try to remember that Jesus on the Cross underwent the same experience in the midst of His sufferings. Is it not said in the Gospel: ‘They blasphemed him, wagging their heads.’²³ That thought helps me to offer up the sacrifice cheerfully.”



“You are suffering much,” I said. “Are you disheartened?”

She answered:

²³ Mark 15:29.

“. . . Oh, no! I am not at all unhappy. . . .
God gives me only as much as I am able to bear.”



I exclaimed: “My poor little one! You, too, may well repeat that verse of the psalm: ‘My exile is prolonged!’”
She said:

“. . . But I myself do not find it long. The fact that I am suffering does not make it longer. . . .”



We had been fervently praying she might have a little relief from her sufferings. Seeing the prayer was not heard, she made this comment later on:

“Notwithstanding the sentiment [of disappointment] I experienced at the first moment, I told the good God I love Him still more, and all the saints too.”



She had been, for some days, in a state of inexpressible anguish. From time to time, during the period, she implored us to pray, and to obtain prayers for her. She cried:

“Oh! how necessary it is to pray for the agonizing! If people only knew! How necessary is that prayer at Compline: ‘*Procul recedant somnia et noctium phantasmata!* . . .’²⁴

²⁴ Far let idle visions fly
No phantom of the night molest.

"I believe the Evil One has obtained God's permission to tempt me by such extreme suffering to make me lose both patience and faith."



She was moaning, but very gently.

"Oh! how I am groaning," she said. "However, I would not wish to suffer less! I am ready for anything. . . . Abandonment is so necessary! . . . My little sisters, I want you to rejoice."



AUGUST 26, 1897

They had left the blessed candle burning all night. She observed:

"The night has not been too bad, and that is due to the blessed candle."



Echoing her habitual disposition of soul, she said to Our Mother who came to give her the blessing:

"I am glad I have not asked God for suffering, for that obliges Him, so to speak, to give me the necessary courage. . . ."



I said to her: "It seems to me you have been made for suffering; your soul is tempered for it."

She answered:

". . . Ah, yes! I am able to bear much interior soul suffering . . . but as for bodily suffering, I am like a little child, very little. . . . I just suffer from moment to moment, I do not think about it.

"Mother, God's help is so necessary when we are suffering so much."



She was suffering continually from thirst, and Sister Marie of the Sacred Heart said to her: "Would you like a little iced water?"

And Thérèse let the answer escape her:

"I should like it very much!"

Sister Marie of the Sacred Heart gently chided her, and said: "But Our Mother has *ordered* you to ask yourself for whatever you may need. Do that in obedience."

Thérèse replied:

"I do indeed ask for everything I actually need."

"You only ask, then, for what is necessary, and not for that which might give you some relief?" she was asked.

"No, I ask for only what is *necessary*," was the answer.

Sometime after she had taken the drink, she was looking at the glass of iced water. They told her to drink a little more, but the Saint answered:

“No, my tongue is not parched enough.”



AUGUST 27, 1897

“I am afraid,” I said, “that your sickness might continue until the spring. What would you say about this?”

She replied:

“. . . Ah! well, I would say ‘so much the better.’”



AUGUST 28, 1897

Looking out the window, and pointing to a shady part of the garden, she said to me:

“See, down there, at the side of the chestnut trees, do you see that black hole wherein nothing is distinguishable? . . . Well, I am in a place like that, as regards both body and soul. . . . Ah! yes, what darkness! But I dwell there in peace.”



Gazing on the statue of Our Blessed Mother, Thérèse exclaimed:

“My good Blessed Virgin, that which makes me desire death is the fact that I cause so much fatigue

to the Infirmarian. And then, too, I think that my little sisters are grieving to see me suffering so much. Yes, I should like to die."



The Mother Prioress and some other sisters made allusion to her beauty and her exterior charms, and Thérèse heard about it. She said later:

"Ah! what does that matter to me! It means less than nothing to me, and only wearies me. When one is so near to death, she cannot find any pleasure in that!"



She said to one of her novices:

"When I am in heaven, you must often fill my hands with little sacrifices and prayers, to give me the pleasure of letting fall a shower of graces upon souls."



AUGUST 29, 1897

I said to her: "It is very hard to suffer the way you are suffering, and then have no interior consolation either."

She replied:

"Yes, but mine is a suffering without inquietude. I am happy to suffer, since God so wills it."



I read to her from the Mass of this Sunday the parable of the Good Samaritan. She made answer:

“ . . . I am like that poor traveler, *semi-vivo*, half-living and half-dead.”



AUGUST 30, 1897

I said to her: “Would you be happy if you were told that you were to die in a few days? You would like that better, wouldn't you, than to be told you were to suffer more and more for months and even for years?” Thérèse answered:

“Oh, I should not be at all better pleased. The only thing that pleases me is to do the will of God.”



AUGUST 31, 1897

“Oh! I long to behold the wonders of heaven. Nothing on earth appeals to me any longer. . . .”



“Ah! it is unbelievable how all my hopes have been realized. When I used to read St. John of the Cross, I would ask God to accomplish in my soul all that I found described therein. I begged Him to sanctify me as much in a few years as if I had lived a long life, so that I might be rapidly

consummated in love. . . . And I have been heard. . . .”



She told me how, in the past, in order to mortify self, she would try to dwell in thought on repugnant things during her meals. Then she added:

“. . . But later on, I found it to be more simple to offer to the good God whatever I found to my taste and to thank Him for it.”

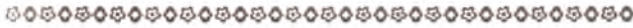


She was quite exhausted, and exclaimed:

“What courage I need to make the sign of the cross!

“My God! . . . My God! have mercy on me. . . . I no longer have anything more to say than that.”

September



SEPTEMBER 2, 1897

“Above all I have offered my interior trial for a relative by marriage who has not the Faith.”



“. . . When we accept with sweetness the humiliation of having fallen into some imperfection, the grace of God returns at once. . . .”



“Oh, yes, I desire heaven! ‘Break the web of this sweet encounter, O my God!’”¹



SEPTEMBER 3, 1897

I told her what I had heard of the triumphal reception given by France to the Czar of Russia.

She answered:

“Ah! I am not dazzled by all that! Speak to me of God, of the examples of the saints, and of all that is the truth. . . .”



¹ St. John of the Cross, *The Living Flame of Love*, strophe I.

SEPTEMBER 4, 1897

On being given a few mouthfuls of meat she confessed:

"I am very glad the meat gives me the same sense of loathing as the rest of the food because then, at least, I do not find any pleasure in it."



"If you only knew how calm the thought of going to heaven so soon leaves me! It is true I am very happy, but I cannot say I experience living joy and transports of delight—no!"

"Would you rather die than live?" I asked.

"Oh, Little Mother, I tell you again I do not prefer one thing more than another. That which God loves best and chooses for me, that is the thing which pleases me most!"



SEPTEMBER 5, 1897

"If someone told you that you were going to die suddenly at this instant, would you have any fear?" she was asked.

". . . Not the least. With what joy I should leave this world," she answered.

"What a disappointment, then, if you recover your health!"

"No, not at all. If I should be cured, I would certainly be regarded with astonishment, and then I would say: 'I am quite happy to have been cured so as to serve God a little longer on earth, because such is His will. I have suffered as if about to die. Very well! I shall commence all over again another time.'"



I remarked to her that she seemed to suffer less while I was beside her.

She answered:

"Oh! Quite otherwise! . . . I suffer much, very much, but it is the Blessed Virgin to whom I make my complaint. . . ."



SEPTEMBER 6, 1897

Someone brought us a relic of the holy martyr, Théophile Vénard, on this day. She received it with tears of joy. All afternoon she was particularly charming and affectionate. I said to her, "I have noticed that just as soon as you are able, you act the same as when you were in good health."

She answered:

". . . Ah! that is very true! Yes, when I can, I do my best to show myself cheerful, so as to give pleasure."



SEPTEMBER 8, 1897

To celebrate the anniversary of her profession, someone brought her a bunch of wild flowers; and, moreover, during the day a little robin came into the Infirmary and alighted on her bed. She was sweetly stirred by these two little events, and explained to us the reason for her joy:

“It is because of the delicacy of the good God in my behalf; outwardly I am overwhelmed with favors yet inwardly I am always under fire of trial . . . but even in this there is peace!”



SEPTEMBER 9, 1897

“Ah! I know well what it means to suffer!”



SEPTEMBER 11, 1897

“I fear I have had a fear of death! But I have no fear of that which comes after death, and I do not regret leaving this life. Oh, no! I only pondered within myself with a sort of apprehension: ‘What is this mysterious separation of the soul from the body?’ . . . It is the first time that I experienced anything like that, but straightway I abandoned myself entirely to the good God.”



“Give me, I pray you, my crucifix, so that I may kiss it after the act of contrition, to gain the plenary indulgence in favor of the souls in purgatory. I can no longer offer them anything more than that!”



“Ought I to be afraid of the Evil One? It seems to me I ought not, because I do everything through obedience.”



She made two crowns of cornflowers for the statue of the “Virgin of the Smile.”² One was placed at Our Lady’s feet and the other in her hands. I said to her, pointing to the latter: “You doubtless think this one is destined for you?”

She responded:

“. . . Oh, no! the Blessed Virgin can do what she likes with it. What I give to her is for her pleasure. . . .”



A little later she repeated:

²The Miraculous Virgin, which had been brought down to the Infirmary. These two crowns have been preserved, and are shown today among her relics.

"I do not long to see God upon earth. Oh, no! And yet I love Him! I love the Blessed Virgin and the saints very much also; yet I do not desire to see them either. I prefer to live by faith."



A novice, thinking to give her an agreeable distraction, brought her an illustrated book containing various stories; but she refused it, saying:

"How could you think this book would interest me? I am too near to eternity to wish to distract myself with such trifles. . . ."



SEPTEMBER 13, 1897

Someone brought her some violets.
She whispered:

"Ah, the perfume of violets! . . ."

Then she made me a sign wishing to know if she might breathe their perfume without failing in mortification.



SEPTEMBER 14, 1897

Someone brought her a beautiful rose from the monastery garden. She let the leaves fall on her crucifix with much love and affection, taking each petal to soothe Our Lord's Wounds.

"In the month of September," she said, "the little *Thérèse* still lets fall the petals of the spring rose upon Jesus:

"Unpetaling for thee the springtime rose
Thus would I dry thy tears,'" she murmured.

And as the petals slipped down from her bed on to the floor of the Infirmary, she said:

"Gather up those petals carefully,³ my little sisters, for they will serve to give pleasure later on. Do not let even one be lost. . . ."



"Ah, now I have the hope that my exile will be short."



The doctor had told her that she would not have any agony, and as she was suffering more and more, she sighed:

"Yet they told me that I should not have any agony. . . . But, after all, I am quite willing to have one."

³One of these petals did indeed cure, in September, 1910, an old man named Ferdinand Aubry of cancer of the tongue in the hospital of the Little Sisters of the Poor at Lisieux.

We asked, "If you were free to choose—either to have one or not to have one—which would you choose?"

"I should choose nothing," she said.



SEPTEMBER 15, 1897

I said to her: "When you are in heaven, your great sufferings of the present time will appear very small."

She replied:

"Oh, even on earth I find them small enough. . . ."



In the evening, during recreation, she said to me:

"This afternoon I heard the reply given to a sister who asked for news about me: 'She is very tired,' was the answer. Then I thought within myself: 'Yes, that is quite true. It is just that. Yes, I am like a traveler worn out and harassed, who falls down as he reaches the end of his journey. . . . Yes, but it is into the arms of the good God that I shall fall.' . . ."



SEPTEMBER 16, 1897

In answer to many questions I asked her, she said:

"That which draws the light and help of God, in guiding and helping souls, is not to relate our

personal troubles in order to find relief. Besides, in that way we do not obtain true relief; instead of calming ourselves, we only succeed in exciting ourselves."



SEPTEMBER 17, 1897

We expressed our grief at seeing her physical condition grow worse.

She admonished us:

"... Beside the sick we must always be cheerful! We must not lament as those who have no hope. . . . You will end by making me regret life."

We answered, "Oh! it would not be easy to make you regret life."

Then, in a tone just a little mischievous, she answered:

"... That is true. . . . I only said that to frighten you."



SEPTEMBER 20, 1897

The doctor had praised her heroic patience.

She exclaimed:

"How can he say I am patient? That is not true. I am always groaning, sighing, and crying all the

time: 'My God, oh, my God, my strength is gone . . . have mercy on me—have mercy on me.'"



SEPTEMBER 22, 1897

I said to her: "My poor little one! How much you suffer, and apparently the saints have forsaken you. You appeal to them, and they will not come to fetch you."

" . . . Oh! I love them very much, all the same. But they want to see just how far I can push my confidence. . . ."



After recalling many occasions in her religious life when she had been very much humiliated, I added: "Oh! how many times I pitied you!"

"It was not necessary, I assure you, to pity me so much. I soared so far above all those things that I came through humiliations fortified by them; there has been no one more courageous than I before the fire. . . ."



SEPTEMBER 24, 1897

On this anniversary of her Veiling, I had obtained the favor of having a Mass offered for her and she thanked me. But when I saw how much she was suffering, I said sadly: "Ah! you are not in the least relieved."

She answered:

"It is for my relief, then, that you had the Mass said?"

"It is for your welfare . . ." I replied.

"My welfare! Without doubt, then, that is suffering . . ."



"Very soon I shall speak only the language of the angels."



"Have you any intuition about your death?"

". . . Ah! Mother! about intuitions! . . . If you only knew in what poverty I find myself. I know no more than you know. . . . I divine nothing except what I see and hear. But my soul, notwithstanding the darkness, enjoys a most astonishing peace."



"You never appear to be tired of suffering, but in the depth of your soul are you not a little weary of it?" I asked.

"Why, no! When I can bear no more, then I can bear no more, and that is all there is to it!" She smiled.



"You will go to heaven amid the Seraphim."

"Ah! if I do, I shall not imitate them. They all cover themselves with their wings in the presence of the Lord.⁴ I shall take good care not to cover myself with mine."



SEPTEMBER 25, 1897

I related to her what had been said during recreation concerning the responsibility of those who had charge of souls and who had lived a long time.

She said to me:

"The little ones shall be judged with extreme sweetness.⁵ . . . It is possible to remain little even when in the most responsible offices, and when living to a great age.

"If I died at eighty years of age, if I had been in many monasteries and charged with numerous responsibilities, I should always have remained just as little as I am today. I am convinced of this. And it is written that in the end the Lord will arise to save all the meek and humble ones on earth.⁶ It does not say to judge but to save."



⁴ Isa. 6:2.

⁵ Wisdom 6:7.

⁶ Ps. 75:9.

On one of those last days she was suffering extremely, and in her anguish she said to me:

“Oh, Mother, what does it matter to write eloquently about suffering! Nothing! nothing! One must have experience of actual suffering to know the value of such utterances.”

I kept a rather painful remembrance of those words, when on this day, September 25, she appeared to recall to mind what she had said to me, and, gazing at me in an altogether singular manner, she pronounced these words:

“I know well now that all I have said and written is entirely true. . . . It is true that I have desired to suffer much for God, and it is true that I desire it still.”



Someone said: “Ah, what you are suffering is frightful!”
She answered:

“. . . No, it is not frightful. A little victim of love can never find frightful that which her Bridegroom sends her. . . .”



SEPTEMBER 27, 1897

One of the novices came for a few moments to the Infirmary. Seeing her there so calm and strong in the midst of such suffering, the novice exclaimed: “You are an angel of sweetness and patience!”

"Oh! no, I am not an angel. . . . The angels cannot suffer; they are not as happy as I am!"



SEPTEMBER 28, 1897

"The air of earth fails me! When shall the good God give me the air of heaven? . . ."



SEPTEMBER 29, 1897

The eve of her death. During the morning she seemed to be in her agony. She had a painful rattling in the throat, and could no longer breathe. At midday she said to Mother Prioress:

"Mother, is this the agony? How ought I to set about dying? I shall never know how to die! . . ."



I read to her in French the Office of St. Michael the Archangel, and also the prayers for the dying. When the devils were referred to, she made a childish gesture as if to threaten them, and smilingly exclaimed:

"Oh! Oh!"

in a tone which seemed to say: "I have no fear of them."



After the doctor left, she said to Our Mother:

“Is it today, Mother?”

Mother Prioress answered in the affirmative, and when we added, “The good God is very happy today,” Thérèse cried courageously:

“And I am also happy.”



“. . . If I should die just now, what happiness!”

In the afternoon she exclaimed:

“I am utterly exhausted! Ah! pray for me. If you only knew! . . .”



To Sister Geneviève of the Holy Face, who asked a word of farewell, Thérèse whispered:

“I have said all . . . all is accomplished! . . . It is love alone that counts.”



After Matins she was enduring a veritable martyrdom, and, joining her hands, she murmured in a sweet, plaintive voice:

“Yes, my God! Yes, my God! I desire it all.”

"Are you suffering atrociously?" Our Mother asked.

"No, Mother, not atrociously, but much, very much. . . . I can just about bear it."

She begged to be left alone for the night, but Mother Prioress would not consent to it. Sister Marie of the Sacred Heart and Sister Geneviève of the Holy Face (her two sisters) shared together the consolation of that last vigil.

THE DAY OF HER DEATH

SEPTEMBER 30, 1897

In the morning I watched beside her during Mass. She did not utter a single word; she was exhausted, and she was breathing only with great difficulty. Her sufferings, so I gathered, were altogether inexpressible. At one moment she joined her hands and, gazing at the statue of the Blessed Virgin placed so as to face her bed, she said:

"Oh! how fervently I have prayed to her! But it is all pure agony, without any admixture of consolation. . . ."



Throughout the day she lay there in torment without one moment's respite. All her strength seemed spent, and yet, to our great surprise, she was able to move, and even to sit up in bed.

She said:

"See, Mother, what strength I have today. No, I am not going to die now. Perhaps months await

me yet. I do not believe it is death, but just more suffering for me. . . . And tomorrow it will be worse!

“Ah, well, so much the better!” she sighed.



“Oh, my God! . . . I love Him, the good God! . . .

“Oh, my good Blessed Virgin, come to my aid. . . .

“If this be the agony, what then will death be like? . . .”



“Oh, Mother, I assure you that the chalice is full to overflowing. . . . But God is not going to abandon me. . . . He has never abandoned me!”



“Yes, my God, do all You will, but have mercy on me! . . .

“My little sisters, my little sisters, pray for me! . . .

“My God, my God, You are so good! Oh, yes, You are so good! I know it! . . .”



Toward three o'clock in the afternoon she fixed her arms in the form of a cross, and the Mother Prioress placed upon her knees a picture of Our Lady of Mount Carmel. She gazed on it for an instant, and said:

“Oh, Mother, present me quickly to the Blessed Virgin. Prepare me to die well.”

The Mother Prioress, answering, told her she had always understood and practiced humility, and therefore her preparation had been already made. She reflected for a moment, and then humbly pronounced these words:

“Yes, it seems to me that I have never sought anything but the truth. . . . Yes, I have understood humility of heart.”

She repeated once more:

“All that I have written about my desire for suffering, oh! yes, it is quite true!”

And with firm assurance:

“I do not repent of having delivered myself up to Love.”



From that moment on it seemed to be no longer she who was suffering. Several times, as I watched beside her, I was reminded of the martyrs delivered into the hands of the executioners, yet animated by a power divine.

She repeated again with fervor:

“Oh! no, I do not repent of having delivered myself up to Love; quite the contrary! . . .”



A little later on she said:

“I would never have believed it possible to suffer so much! Never! never! I can only explain it by my ardent desire to save souls. . . .”



Then, with anguish:

“I cannot breathe and I cannot die. . . .”

But with resignation:

“I am very willing to suffer more!”



And later:

“All my smallest desires have been realized. . . . Then the greatest of all, *to die of love*, must also be realized. . . .”



Toward five o'clock in the evening I happened to be alone with her, when suddenly her features changed, and her agony began. The Community assembled in the Infirmary, and she greeted all the sisters with a sweet smile. She held her crucifix firmly in her hands and kept her eyes fixed upon it. For more than two hours the terrible

death rattle tore her chest. Her features were contracted, her hands purple, her feet were icy-cold, and she trembled in every limb. The death-sweat stood out in great drops on her forehead and coursed down her face. The ever-increasing oppression made her utter feeble, involuntary cries in her efforts to breathe. Thinking to moisten her parched lips, Sister Geneviève of the Holy Face (Céline, her sister) placed a small piece of ice upon them. No one will ever forget the look of heavenly sweetness with which our little Saint gazed upon "Céline" at that moment. It was like a sublime encouragement, a supreme good-bye.

At six o'clock the Angelus sounded, and she raised her eyes pleadingly toward the statue of the Blessed Virgin.

At a few moments after seven o'clock, thinking that the end was yet some way off, Mother Prioress dismissed the assembled Community. Thérèse sighed and said:

"Oh! Mother, is it not yet the agony? Am I not going to die?"

Mother answered:

"Yes, my child, it is the agony; but perhaps the good God wills to prolong it for some hours."

She answered courageously:

"Ah, well! . . . So be it; so be it! . . . Oh! I do not wish to suffer less."

Then, looking at her crucifix:

"Oh! . . . I love Him! . . . My God! . . . I . . . love . . . Thee!"



Scarcely had she uttered these words when she gently fell back, her head inclined a little to the right. We thought that all was over, and Our Mother had the Infirmary bell sounded quickly to call the Community.

"Open all the doors," she called (there were three doors leading into the Infirmary). Her words seemed to have a singularly solemn significance at such a moment, and I felt that in heaven Our Lord was repeating those same words to His angels in favor of His little Thérèse.

The sisters came in time to kneel around the bed and witness that last ecstasy of the dying Saint. Her face regained the lily-like tint which it had possessed when she was in full health; her gaze, remaining fixed on high, irradiated and expressed such happiness *as surpassed all her desires*. She made certain movements with her head, as though at intervals she was being divinely wounded by the shafts of love.

Immediately after that ecstasy, which lasted for the space of a Credo, she closed her eyes and breathed her last sigh.

That was at about twenty minutes past seven o'clock. Our holy little Sister preserved in death an ineffable smile and was of a ravishing beauty.

She held her crucifix so firmly that it was by no means easy to detach it from her hands, to prepare her for burial.

Sister Marie of the Sacred Heart and I fulfilled this office, together with Sister Aimée of Jesus, a former Infirmary, and we remarked then how very young Thérèse appeared, so that we should not have thought her more than a girl twelve or thirteen years of age.

Later, on the contrary, when her body was exposed in the choir, her countenance assumed a very imposing expression.

Her members remained quite supple until her burial on October 4, 1897.

I should like to mention here two other circumstances that marked the evening of this September 30.

During the long agony of St. Thérèse of the Child Jesus, a multitude of little birds took their station on a tree beside the wide-open window of the Infirmary, where they continued to sing with all their might until her death. Never before had there been such a concert in our garden. I was rather depressed by the contrast between so much suffering within and the joyous notes from without.

An aged sister, who had not always completely understood our Thérèse, was touched by this incident and remarked to me afterward:

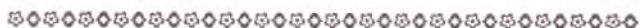
"Did you notice, Mother, the singing of those birds? I assure you that it was really extraordinary."

Moreover, throughout the course of her sickness our little Saint had affirmed that an unclouded sky should mark the moment of her "going forth" to God. And so it happened, for although September 30, 1897, had been a dark and rainy day, nevertheless, toward seven o'clock in the evening, the clouds all dispersed with surpassing rapidity, and soon the stars were scintillating in a bright, clear sky.

SISTER AGNES OF JESUS, O.C.D.

Appendix A*

Letter of Our Holy Father
Pius XII
on the Way of Spiritual Childhood



To Our Venerable Brother
FRANÇOIS-MARIE PICAUD¹
Bishop of Bayeux and Lisieux



*Venerable Brother, Greetings and Apostolic
Benediction.*

It was with paternal joy that We learned that the fiftieth anniversary of the blessed death of Saint Thérèse of the Child Jesus would be the occasion of a great National Congress, in the course of which orators of distinction would endeavor to elucidate the spiritual message of the little Saint of Lisieux. The timeliness of this message seems to have been only accentuated during the past half-century. We, per-

* Appendix A and Appendix B were published by the Carmelite Nuns of New York in 1948 as a single pamphlet under the title of "Letter of Our Holy Father, Pius XII, on the Way of Spiritual Childhood." It is here reprinted by the kind permission of Saint Anthony Guild, Paterson, New Jersey.

¹ On the occasion of the National Theresian Congress, September 24 to September 30, 1947.

sonally, are allied by so many intimate ties to her whom, recently, We had the happiness of giving as secondary patroness to your dear country that We hasten to send to the participants in the Congress Our encouragement and Our Blessing. We would even seize this opportunity to recall briefly how important it seems to Us, in the present uncertainties, that all, great and small, learned and ignorant, follow the example of the holy Carmelite who desired and knew how to live so perfectly here below as a true child of her Heavenly Father.

The way of spiritual childhood, which, like so many other saints, she has recalled to us, is the way recommended in these words of the Saviour to His Apostles: "Amen, I say to you, unless you be converted, and become as little children, you shall not enter into the kingdom of heaven" (Matt. 18:3).

Some there are who believe that this is a special way, reserved to the innocent souls of young novices, to guide them in their first steps only, and that it does not suit persons already mature, who because of the great responsibilities imposed upon them must exercise much prudence. This is to forget that Our Lord Himself has recommended this way to ALL children of God, even to those who, like the Apostles He trained, have the greatest of responsibilities: that of souls.

*The World of Today Has Great Need
of Understanding the Message
of the Saint of Lisieux*

Only too often do we forget that, to see clearly amid the complexity of the problems which today

torment humanity, we must have, together with prudence, that superior simplicity which gives wisdom; that simplicity which Saint Thérèse of Lisieux manifests to us in the most amiable manner and with that profound attractiveness which influences all hearts. The actual world, led astray by so many causes, and in particular by pride in its scientific discoveries, by its exclusive preoccupation with worldly goods, and by the conflict of interests resulting therefrom, is in dire need of understanding this message of humility, supernatural elevation and simplicity.

But if we are to understand it well, we must not lose sight of the great wisdom of this little Saint, her penetrating grasp of the things of God, and her interior sufferings, heroically borne, which raised her to a very intimate union with God. We see by her life that the way of spiritual childhood, as she understood it under the inspiration of the Holy Ghost, leads souls to the performance of the most difficult and exalted acts; as, for example, to the entire offering of themselves to fructify the apostolate of the missions and to hasten the conversion of sinners.

This spirituality reminds us of the spirituality of Saint Catherine of Siena and of the great Saint Teresa of Avila. It also reminds us of these words of the *Imitation*: "The true glory and holy joy is to glory in Thee, O Lord, and not in self, and to rejoice in Thy greatness and not in our own strength, and not to delight in any creature but for Thy sake" (Book III, ch. xl, 5).

Spiritual Childhood

This way of spiritual childhood is very lofty; nevertheless, it is truly that which becomes every child of

God, even the aged. Saint Thérèse of Lisieux was struck by the resemblances which exist between natural childhood and spiritual childhood, and she also keenly discerned their differences.

The resemblances are obvious. Generally speaking, the child is simple, without duplicity and without useless complication; he is also conscious of his weakness, for he must receive all from his parents. He is therefore drawn to believe all that his mother tells him, to have absolute confidence in her, and to love her with his whole heart. Then, in consequence, if his mother is Christian and often speaks to him of God, the child practices early in life the three theological virtues: he believes in God, he hopes in Him, and he loves Him, even before learning the written formula of the acts of faith, hope and charity.

But *spiritual* childhood is distinguished from the other by maturity of judgment, supernaturally inspired by the interior Master. "Be not children in sense," says Saint Paul, "but in malice be children" (I Cor. 14:20).

Moreover, as Saint Thérèse of the Child Jesus has observed, and in this she follows Saint Francis of Sales, while the child of the natural order, as he develops, must learn to take care of himself, the child of God, on the other hand, as he advances in the order of grace, realizes ever more clearly that he will never be able spiritually to provide for himself. He understands that, guided by prudence, he must live in a docility superior to his personal activity, a docility which ultimately will give him entrance to the bosom of the Father, "in sinu Patris," for all eternity.

This way of childhood, if rightly understood, recalls

to us, then, the superior simplicity of the soul that goes straight to God with a very pure intention. It emphasizes the importance of humility, which impels us to beg the grace of God since "without Him we can do nothing" toward salvation.

Then by following this way, faith becomes more lively, penetrating and delectable, because God is pleased to enlighten those who will listen to Him; and hope becomes more and more trustful. It tends with certainty to salvation. "Certitudinaliter tendit in suum finem," as Saint Thomas says (II-II, ac q. 18, a.4.): "Hope tends to its end with certainty." It preserves us from discouragement by reminding us that the Lord, precisely because of our weakness, watches over us solicitously and loves to help those who have recourse to Him. Along this way, charity draws us more speedily to love God with our whole heart, and with a higher aim than that of our personal perfection; to love Him purely for Himself, and that He may reign in souls by vivifying them and by drawing them mightily to Himself.

Finally, the child of God, though simple in his relations with God and with the saints, is also, under the inspiration of the gift of counsel, very prudent in his relations with those he should not trust. And though conscious of his weakness, he is very strong, through the gift of fortitude, when called upon to persevere in the midst of the greatest difficulties. He recalls the words of Saint Paul: "Cum enim infirmor, tunc potens sum . . ." (II Cor. 12:10): "When I am weak, then am I powerful," for it is in God alone that I place my trust.

This message is first of all, in the words of Jesus, "revealed to little ones" (Saint Luke 10:21), who are thus invited to sanctify themselves by fidelity to the grace of the present moment in the most ordinary events of life, and who, by the acceptance of daily sacrifices, can reach constant union with God. These "little ones," after having put into practice the content of this message, are called upon to communicate it to others; to all those in need of understanding it, to those unaware of their own indigence and who would receive life more abundantly if their hearts were only open to it. The way of spiritual childhood makes us avoid the danger of that wholly natural and excessive "activity" which prevents interior recollection and prayer, thus hindering the supernatural fruits of sanctification and of salvation.

Souls who understand this way have found the precious pearl spoken of in the Gospel; they perceive that the true Christian life is eternal life begun, and God operates in them in order to reign more profoundly in the minds and hearts of men.

May the Holy Spirit grant the abundance of these graces to all who will take part, afar or near, in the coming Congress and who thus aspire to vitalize in personal living that truth which makes us free!

Such are Our wishes for the supernatural success of these Theresian sessions. As a former pilgrim to Lisieux, We have preserved such profound memories of the sacred impressions received at the glorious tomb of Saint Thérèse of the Child Jesus so it would be impossible that we should not advance with all Our power the radiant spiritual message with which heaven

has so opportunely charged the holy Carmelite in an epoch having such great need of it.

Therefore, it is with a heart filled with sweet confidence that We send to all the members of the Congress, beginning with you, Venerable Brother, and to all the devoted organizers of these commemorative feasts, Our Apostolic Blessing.

Given at Castelgandolfo, August 7, 1947, in the ninth year of Our Pontificate.

PIUS PP. XII

Appendix B

At Lisieux in the Year 1937



Just ten years before the Theresian Congress of 1947, our Holy Father Pope Pius XII, then Cardinal Pacelli, had depicted the mission of Saint Thérèse of the Child Jesus in similar terms. In the oration he delivered as Papal Legate at the Blessing of her Basilica in Lisieux, July 11, 1937, he said in part:

The dazzling genius of Augustine, the luminous wisdom of Thomas Aquinas, have shed forth upon souls the rays of an imperishable splendor; through them, Christ and His doctrine have become better known. The divine poem lived out by Francis of Assisi has given to the world an imitation, as yet unequaled, of the life of God made Man. Through him, legions of men and women have learned to love God more perfectly. But a little Carmelite who had hardly reached adult age has conquered in less than half a century innumerable hosts of disciples. Doctors of the law have become children at her school; the Supreme Shepherd has exalted her and prays to her with humble and assiduous supplication; and even at this moment, from one end of the earth to the other, there are millions of souls whose interior life has received the beneficent influence of the little book, *The Autobiography*.

Our dear Saint had, then, good reason to say: "I feel my mission is about to begin. My mission is to give my little way to souls. . . ."

Saint Thérèse of Lisieux had said of herself: "Lord Jesus, may no one occupy himself with me; may I be trampled underfoot, forgotten as a little grain of sand!"

Forgotten! and behold, O Little Saint, on this day, at this very hour, the entire world turns toward you its thought, its attention, its prayer. And, Little Grain of Sand, you have incorporated to yourself so many other "little souls" that you are raising to the heavens the most magnificent of spiritual temples. . . .

"I long to save souls," Thérèse had said, "even after my death. . . . I shall desire in heaven the same thing I desired on earth: to love Jesus and to make Him loved. I count on not remaining inactive in heaven. My desire is to work still for the Church and for souls. I have asked this favor of the good God, and I am certain that He will hear me."

The story of her admirable survival sings throughout the universe how truly God has heard her during these last forty years, and how He still hears her unceasingly. The epic poem of her apostolic conquests, put to music by the voice of nations, resounds from pole to pole. Holy Church herself has modulated the theme and has accelerated the time by abridging, in order to raise Thérèse to the altar, all canonical delays, and by proclaiming her—this little contemplative who died at the age of twenty-four—universal Patroness of the Missions.

Ah, Little Saint, how great you are, and how nu-

merous is your spiritual family! You are great, O Little Soul, Little Tabernacle of God living amongst us! You have become the refuge of all humanity, supplicating, suffering, and militant, which has daily recourse to you!

In these hymns which ascend to you, I believe I hear an echo of that which Isaias chanted to the glory of the new Sion: "Sing forth praise, and make a joyful noise. . . . Enlarge the place of thy tent and stretch out the skins of thy tabernacle. Spare not the land; lengthen thy cords; strengthen thy stakes. For thou shalt pass on to the right hand, and to the left; and thy seed shall inherit the Gentiles, and shall inhabit the desolate cities" (Isa. 54:1-3).

Indeed every day, O Thérèse, do you receive legions of children who consecrate to you their innocence, virgins who imitate you in the cloister, the suffering for whom you win either health of body or the admirable heroism of your conformity to the Will of Merciful Love. You sustain missionaries in the fatigues and disappointments of their distant apostolate; your picture brings your smile to them in the coldness of the Siberian isba and in the dampness of the straw hut, to the farthest confines of land and sea, even to the very clouds and to the heights of the firmament!

Little temple of God, you are the vast temple of a humanity which you have conquered! Behold the tabernacle of God with men. "Ecce tabernaculum Dei cum hominibus."

